

NEBULA

SCIENCE FICTION

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Stories by H. PHILIP STRATFORD, WILLIAM F. TEMPLE, Etc.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

CRADLE ★
OF ★
STARS ★

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Galaxy NGC 2237 in Monoceros

by **KENNETH JOHNS**

OUT in the mighty swirling arms of spiral galaxies lie strange twisted clouds of glowing gas. These are the birth places of new stars. They are clouds where the cool gas and dust of space compact, and from the first whimper of radiation grow into the blazing splendour of blue supergiants.

The photograph shows such a galactic nebula. Here, in this turbulent whirlpool, new stars are being born.

This galactic nebula is situated in our own Galaxy in the constellation of Monoceros and it is close enough for the nodules of gas and dust to be seen limned against the background of glowing gas. Each nodule will condense not to a single star but into a shower of a thousand or more individual stars.

Astronomers call it NGC 2237; but it is such a beautiful object in the heavens that the far more appropriate name of Rosette Nebula is more often used. Its luminescence is due to the blue supergiants born in its heart, spendthrift stars feeding luxuriously upon the rich gas and dust in the Nebula and, in return, filling the whole of nearby space with their radiation.

Reflected, absorbed and re-radiated by interstellar debris, their light creates a tracery of filaments awe-inspiring in their complexity and beauty. But, to astronomers, the awe lies in the fact that here they can actually see the universal process by which the blue stars—Population I stars—are born. The black nodules can be seen solely because of the dust associated with them; the gas is transparent to visible light but opaque to infra-red radiation.

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NEBULA

SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by PETER HAMILTON

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Look here . .

If there is one thing that no one can complain about in this issue it is lack of variety. Again I have drawn from the infinite resources of space and time to give you as good a cross section from contrasting sectors of each as is available to me.

E. R. James has written his novelette around the preposition that to manufacture any reasonably advanced product of civilization one would require vast resources and to refine and prepare these one needs a large number of workers, who, in their turn have to be fed, clothed, housed and entertained. Of course, it takes another large number of people working full time as well as a further batch of natural resources to attain this and so on *ad infinitum*. It is for this very reason that the first Terran colony on Mars or Venus will require to reach quite gigantic proportions before it can become truly self-supporting—a point seldom taken into consideration by science-fiction authors—and of course there is the question of whether Mars or Venus could support several million human beings under any circumstances.

An author who has never appeared before in our pages, H. Philip Stratford, gives us our novel this time and perhaps raises one of the most controversial issues in this number. What it boils down to is this: if each of us as an individual was not taught from birth that he has a set of "limitations" (e.g., can't fly, be emersed in boiling oil, telepath, etc., etc.), would he in fact be limited in any way? It has been proved under hypnosis that a subject is capable of many feats of strength and endurance which would otherwise be quite impossible for him and this has been explained by the fact that his whole mind is concentrated on the commands of the hypnotist thus leaving no mental energy to be absorbed by the infinite trivia of extraneous thought and observation which usually occupies three parts of human consciousness. It is true also that under great stress such as impending danger to oneself for a friend, when an individual has no time to realize his incapacibilities, he can suddenly attain quite immense strength or speed.

This is, perhaps, not quite what Stratford has in mind; but that there is something in it would be difficult to deny. There are, however, two questions which remain to be answered: who or what taught the human race it's code of limitations in the first place and second, how do we go about unlearning them, if that is possible or even desirable, now?

The other stories I haven't room to mention in detail, but you can rest assured that they are all up to the usual NEBULA standard. Why don't you write me a letter and let me know your reactions to the stories in this number.

Peter Hamilton

Pompey's Planet

*What was the mysterious purpose to which the millions
slaved unceasingly, night and day, without knowing why?*

Illustrated by Arthur Thomson

A braking orbit around the southern hemisphere confirmed Sue's report that it was entirely ocean—although vast areas of weed darkened all the shallows, and in several places he saw clusters of ships and floating platforms with the derricks and machinery of undersea mining.

Half way around the northern hemisphere, peculiar formations of cloud hove up over the skyline just as Sue had described. He adjusted velocity and height and glided towards them, twenty miles up, rockets prudently silent.

Ships of all sizes speckled the scintillating water visible between the eastward drifting clouds. The first pair of islands, close together, bit up like teeth into the sky, seeming places only for the circling seabirds. Yet, as he approached, his sensitive instruments detected radio-activity and later he bit his lip to see the unmistakable cooling towers of atomic piles amongst buildings clustered in the narrow valleys and clinging limpet-like, to the less steep slopes. One lofty structure even looked not unlike a spaceship hangar.

As the craggy outlines slid behind, he noted that ships made a definite line away, like so many foraging ants, towards harbours and shipyards along a low, twenty mile coast some hundred miles ahead.

Behind these, skyscrapers spread into his viewer in dense lines and close packed squares, so that he found himself reminded of cities on his birthplace of far-away Earth. But even those were not like this flat island. Its thirty mile length had not a single open space large enough for him to land—even if he had dared such foolhardiness. And,

all around its north, south and west coastlines, smaller harbours, crowded with boats, were spaced between buildings built on piles over all the shallow water, so that no landing on extended pods was possible.

More open sea, and then an irregular expanse of mist, fifty miles across, passed below. Beneath this shroud, radar pictured a myriad pinnacles of shattered rock, and presently he saw some of these like broken steps down into the clear sea beyond.

Two islets, bleak and rocky, rose in line ahead to complete the chain Sue had reported. While his speed and decreasing height brought them hurtling towards him, the spaceboat's radio-activity counter crackled increasing warning.

Passing over the first he saw signs that something had been concreted over, long ago, and then dug up again. Between the isles, radar shadows pictured shallow water centred with a depression shaped like a crater. Once over this radiation began to taper off. He swallowed hard. Atomic testing grounds, recently used, were exactly like that.

Sue had sent her final, incomplete report from this last island, but there was no sign of her. Then his heart missed a beat. Her spaceboat showed up nose down just off the island—sunk in quite deep water—

Landing wildly, he scrambled out. Faintly aware of the marks of tracked vehicles and other deeper scorings in the rock, he ran to the edge of a low cliff.

Out of the foaming blue water, one landing pod stuck up. From a perch on its end, a winged thing, scaled like a fish, returned his shocked stare.

He hardly dared take his Locator out of the pouch at his belt. But his breath sighed out in relief as its needle swung aimlessly around. That meant the tiny transmitter sealed beneath the skin of Sue's left armpit was out of the Locator's five mile range—at least she had not gone down with her craft.

Only then did he remember the marks on the rock. Immediately he looked back, he saw how the spaceboat, having landed safely, had come to its watery fate. Machines had pushed it to the cliff and toppled it over.

"Fools rush in!" he muttered to himself. "Oh, Sue!"

He turned and ran back to the spaceboat. Clatter of the radio-activity counter filled the little cabin and, thus reminded of another aspect of urgency, he stood, trying to calm his agitation enough to think things out sensibly.

Staffing the post war Survey Ships with a man and wife unit might be a good idea from most points of view, but—well, surely he

was not the first Surveyor to get into a mess because of a wife's impatience?

Since this uncharted planet was almost entirely ocean, why was it that its single string of small islands were densely populated by human beings when the other planet of the System was so much more suitable for colonisation?

Unlikely planets had been known to harbour pockets of resistance left behind by the retreating enemy fleet. And the chances were that fanatics chosen for a suicidal job like that would be hard to convince of the end of 400 years of Galactic war.

It was history that the ruling class—if not the ordinary citizens of the defeated enemy—had been specially bred and trained for ruthless determination.

What a good thing it was he had set the sub etheric broadcaster on the Survey Ship to send out an S O S if he did not return before three days were up.

Obviously Sue had marked her passage over the other islands with a vapour trail a mile wide from idling rockets that ought to have been shut off as his had been. Naturally the local inhabitants had rushed to greet her. But they had not been nearly as friendly as she, in her innocence, had expected. After they had consigned the evidence of her arrival to a watery hiding place, they had carried her off, a prisoner.

He closed his eyes. The rashness of women!

The rapid clattering intruded into his thoughts, and he hurried over to the instruments to study the counter.

The needle trembled in the amber. To stay here more than a few hours would mean absorbing a dose of radiation dangerous to any human. It was no wonder the locals had not waited to receive any second arrival from Space.

He, too, must get clear without delay. On a strange world, he must travel light, be able to move quickly and inconspicuously, and yet be able to defend himself—and wreck havoc if necessary to rescue Sue.

Out of his equipment he passed over an inflatable dinghy and the bulkier weapons such as stun rifles and instead chose a frogman's kit and blaster that, in the recent war, might have been carried by a Space Commando.

After setting the automatic pilot, he carried his gear and a remote control unit—to recall the spaceboat on his return—to the far side of the islet. He watched his link with the Survey ship blast up into the gloriously blue sky; shut up the remote control in its radiation-resisting

case and hid it in a crevice; fastened himself up in the frogman's suit and plunged like a seal into the flashing water.

An undertow aided his breast-stroking arms and paddling feet, so that he broke surface with the low cliff of the islet considerably behind him. Waves raced away from him to cover the windward side of the other islet with spray. Above that he could just see the forbidding mist bank as he rose with the motion of the sea.

He switched on the power unit, soon regained the half-forgotten art of "standing" on the jets fastened to his ankles and was breasting through the rushing waves in a manner that should have been exhilarating, but was not.

For, what might these people be doing to Sue?

He skirted well clear of the radio-active shallows, intending to reach the populous island non-stop.

The Sun, however, was still quite high in the sky as he came into line with the last of the misty pinnacles, and, deciding to wait for darkness, he turned in towards them.

They rose out of the dark, heaving water, grey and gleaming in the shadow of the perpetual mist. On the shingle of a narrow cove, he clambered awkwardly to his feet. It was a relief to take off the oxygen mask and tilt back the tight goggles.

The breeze struck chill as he looked up. Perhaps he could keep warm and also increase his meagre knowledge by climbing this shattered rock to a point of greater advantage.

With flippers clipped to his belt, he clambered to the top—and dropped flat.

Through streamers of mist, a small sailing boat was beating in towards him. Its single occupant handled the tiller in the confident manner of long use, while looking back over his shoulder.

Robin, suddenly thankful for the covering mist, went slithering down into the next tiny cove. On an isolated world such as this, the arrival of a woman in a spaceship would be news even the lowliest fisherman would hear about.

The boat's bows crunched into the shingle a mere ten feet from him and its occupant, intent upon his landing, ran down the sail, leaped out and hitched the mooring rope to a natural bollard.

"Who are you?" asked Robin in the lingua franca of the Spaceways.

The man spun around with his hand drawing an old-fashioned pistol from his belt. Then he saw the blaster steady in Robin's hand. "So! One of Pompey's police."



He glanced at the rocks all around Robin. "What no reinforcements?" His lean swarthy face split with an insolent grin. "Or would Pompey only spare one man from urging on the workers to hunt us here. " His voice trailed off.

Robin studied him. Black ringlets of hair hung around the woollen, tasseled headgear. Muscles showed firmly through the singlet that was extraordinarily like those worn by spacemen. Beneath the navy blue briefs—that might also have been a spaceman's—a pair of brawny legs ended in sandals still dripping from their recent wetting.

"Yes, I'm Reynard," said the man with smiling defiance. "Reynard the Fox. You've a nerve to come here all alone to try to take me back."

Robin realised this was a deserter, who might willingly give him useful information. "Did you see a spaceship pass over here two days ago?"

"A spaceship?" The Fox's eyes narrowed. "I don't believe you're one of Pompey's police after all. " He grinned slyly and suddenly kissed his fingers to the wind. "Ah! What a girl she was. Yes, I saw them take her and push the thing—*spaceship* was it?—that brought her, into the sea."

"You did? Then what?"

"My little boat's sails could not keep pace with their motors. The broad shoulders shrugged expressively. "They took her towards City."

"City?"

"Yes, the big island. You've come after her, eh?—out of Space—and know nothing of us here? Well, City's where ordinary folk are kept to produce their goods like battery hens produce eggs—all huddled up together."

"But you aren't certain they landed her there, are you?"

Reynard shrugged. "Pompey won't have anything interfere with production in the factories. If she's there, she'll be well hidden, so that there's no excitement," he said bitterly.

He smiled, a flash of white teeth. "Who can tell? Perhaps the great Captain Pompey himself would want to talk to a woman who had just come from the Stars. Ah, such a shapely girl!"

"Oh?" frowned Robin. "And where do you fit in?"

"But I do not fit in. That is why you find me here." He gestured grandly towards the mist. "These are the Isles of the Free. I am outlaw. They wanted to dedicate me. Not that I am clever at books you understand. It must have been because I want to be different to the others. O-oh! but I was not going to be different in Pompey's way—I prefer to be as free as the seas themselves."

"What do you mean: dedicated?"

"Sent to the Assembly Isles. But who are you—her lover, perhaps?"

"Her husband."

"Husband? Ah, now that is a pity. However—" Reynard spread his hands "—perhaps I will still help you."

A slight sound in the mist above distracted their attention. Flame stabbed, an explosion rang out deafeningly, something hit Robin's shoulder a hammer blow, knocking him half around.

His weapon lost, he dropped to his knees. Reynard was waving frantically upwards. Robin scooped up the blaster in his left hand. Sand, shingle and mist filled the cove with blinding confusion as he fired into the ground.

He leapt into the boat, cast off the rope and, scrambling over the thwarts into the stern, felt it come free of the beach and drift off with the surface current.

Behind Reynard other shapes loomed out of the mist. Robin fired at the water's edge so that spray and a hail of pebbles sent them staggering back.

He hauled up the sail. It flapped a moment before the wind

caught it and swung the boat around. Two shots echoed along the hidden rocks as he scudded away. Then there was only the lap and rush of water as he rubbed his shoulder and thanked heaven his thick suit had turned what must have been a glancing shot.

Evening was drawing in as shore-bound fishing boats thickened around him. With the frogman's suit hidden in the boat's locker, his dress was so like that of the natives that he attracted no attention. When a streamlined patrol craft—more modern than anything else he had so far seen—hailed him angrily: "You're travelling across wind!" he was able to answer in their own language, and correct course without being boarded.

Hoping he could continue to be lost in the crowd, he sculled into the busiest harbour of all and moored at a jetty. A man in a uniform surprisingly like that of his own Space Navy police strode arrogantly towards him, but passed as though not in the habit of speaking to ordinary folk.

A stream of people, coming from a factory block built out over the water, carried him with it and lost him in a three-dimensional maze of sloping streets connecting with several building levels. Another policeman shook a truncheon at him "Keep moving there!" when he tried to stop and take stock.

Fish frying in a crowded cafeteria reminded his senses of hunger but, lacking local currency, he did not dare to go in. He searched for privacy to eat the concentrates in his pouch but crowds hemmed him in everywhere. Several times he was caught in a movement of dull faced people so dense that he had to let himself be carried with it. He noticed that building styles, though universally severe, varied with the levels—as though the original structures had been extended skywards several times over a long period of years.

He found himself back on the quayside amongst the feverish unloading of fish and seaweed from small boats. A boom, swinging in a pannier of fish, knocked his head, a sailor cursed him roundly for getting in the way, and a policeman ordered him back into the thronged streets.

There, since movement was generally in a reverse direction, he was reminded of the changing of the watch on board spaceships he'd known, and realised he was being involved in the changing over of shift workers in the factories. By this time he was beginning to understand the rules of movement on these pedestrian ways, just as a motorist in another age on the broader lands of another world might have discovered the rules of the road.

Increasing dusk above the many levels of street lights gave further

hope of respite from the hurrying multitude.

A sign in a lofty tenement window caught his eye. ROOM TO LET. But, however much he needed a breathing spell, he finally sighed and went on for any landlady would surely ask for a deposit, and he had none of their money.

To pass the time until dark, he began to study the people. A strange race this, living close together like ants, always busy, always hurrying it seemed, intent upon their errands. He walked through a big store and, while pretending to examine some briefs and vests—that were surprisingly similar to his own—he watched what went on. Long years spent in Space made him only slowly aware of differences from other stores on other planets.

There . . . seemed to be no shop assistants, either robot or human, at the counters. People just helped themselves. Bewildered by this observation, he picked up a green vest. As he walked off with it, he expected a hand to drop on his shoulder at any moment—but nothing happened.

Then he noticed that people were queuing before doors at the sides of the store and coming out dressed in the clothes they had taken in. He waited his turn and saw that the doors led to small booths. Still curious, he went in when his turn came. There was a bench and hooks for clothes and a disposal chute marked DISCARDS HERE PLEASE. Changing rather guiltily, he dropped his perspiration stained vest into the chute and went out hurriedly.

Still nothing happened to him. Encouraged, he watched through the lighted window of a cafeteria. Yes, the system seemed to apply in there, too. People came in, selected their food from a long counter, ate and left without any attempt at payment.

Although the streets were less busy, hunger got the better of his feeling of urgency. Fish fried in oil with plankton concentrate and sea greenstuffs were more palatable than he expected. And he walked out, replete, without paying anything.

Above the street lights stars twinkled. In the direction of the coast, he heard what he thought must be the archaic mutter of internal combustion engines. Drawn by a hope of free transport as well as free clothes and food, he was presently watching the boats' catches being taken inland by lorries that disappeared into underground roads.

Thus reminded of the island's crowded multi-levelled extent, he stood for a few minutes lost in the enormity of his task. This anthep of humanity that the outlaw, Reynard the Fox, had called City must contain millions of people.

It staggered him to think what a highly organised people they

were. Perhaps he had been criminally selfish in leaving the Survey ship untended to chase after Sue without waiting for help. This planet was frighteningly devoted to some unknown purpose.

Yet, by the time help came, it might have been too late to save her. Even for him, here on the spot and not forgetting that he could trace her if he came within five miles of her prison, it was very difficult.

How his feet ached! Life in a spaceship did not make one fit for much walking.

He sighed. Women!

There was one of that troublesome sex standing not six paces from him. In the dimness here he could only just make out that her face, pretty enough no doubt in the ordinary way, was drawn into a petulant frown. Every line of her slender young form spoke of trouble for someone, he could tell that. Probably she was just about to come to some idiotic decision—

She ran forward unexpectedly and, holding her nose sprang from the quay. There was a splash.

Puzzled, he walked to the edge. Her head broke the uneasy surface, and disappeared quietly. He waited. It bobbed up and her arms threshed and a cry gurgled faintly up to him, before she went under.

She was committing suicide!

He dived off the edge without thought, broke water cleanly between the rocking boats. He had aimed well for he touched her as he began to rise. Her arms clutched him. He found himself fighting for his life. Silently struggling, they sank together through the darkening water. At last he fended her off, got a handful of her hair and kicked upwards. His straining lungs gasped in air and found its fishy flavour very sweet.

He towed her after him to some stone steps and hauled her out. She seemed very frail as she hunched, panting, at his side.

"Oh why did you have to save me?" she gasped. Then she stared at him between strands of long, bedraggled hair. "What are you—aren't you Pompey's police?"

"No, I'm not Pompey's police." He reflected grimly that she might at least have apologised for trying to take him with her to a watery grave. "What made you want to kill yourself like that?"

She shook water from her hair, parted it and peered at him. "Why were you watching me?"

From awkward cross questioning, he learned that her name was Sybil Gray, she was in love with a young man who had been "dedicated" and who had therefore gone to the Assembly Isles. He gathered that life had not seemed worth while without her Rowland

darling—although he had been proud to have been chosen to go. And she admitted that she too was proud to think that her man had been chosen—at least she had felt proud at the time . . . which was just the sort of contrary reaction that he supposed he might have expected.

“What are these Assembly Isles?” he asked.

Her voice brightened at once with pride. “Oh, very important places. It’s a very special honour to be selected for dedication to Pompey’s Project.”

“What project?”

“How should I know? I’m only a worker. What a silly question to ask me! You must think I’m as stupidly inquisitive as those horrible lost folk—”

“Lost folk? Who’re they? and—why do you call them horrible?”

“They live over there.” She pointed a slender arm towards the misty pinnacles. “They’re horrible people²—because they’ve run off and are lost to us, when we need every man we have . . .”

She sounded as though she were repeating some kind of rule of life learnt as a childhood lesson.

“You are one of them!” she accused suddenly. Her eyes gleamed in the half light. She shrank from him. “I know who you are. You’re the man they’re all looking for—who put the unregistered singlet into that disposal chute!”

He opened his mouth to make reply—but found he had none ready. Because he had saved her life, she ought to have been prepared to do him any favour in return; but, illogical as Sue, she was prepared to believe the worst she could imagine of him. Every line of her strained away from him into the shadows.

Voices sounded on the quay above them. She half started to her feet, triumph changing her entire attitude.

He clapped his hand over her mouth just in time to stifle her scream for help. “Keep still—or—” he breathed.

She crouched, very still, in his grip, as though frightened by the very namelessness of his threat. The voices and footfalls moved along the quay and were swallowed in the unceasing murmur of City.

He continued to hold her. “Now listen,” he said, “and try to be reasonable. You ought to help me—since you’ve lost your boy friend. I’ve got a grudge against your rulers, just like you. They’ve kidnapped my wife. Perhaps, if we worked together, we could do something to the advantage of both of us—eh?”

The tenseness gradually went out of her and she did not move as he released her. “You mean your wife’s been dedicated?”

"No." He hesitated a moment longer, then took her into his confidence. There seemed nothing else he could do, if he were not to kill her or leave her tied up, neither of which possibilities appealed to him.

She seemed to accept his story—unlikely though he feared it might sound to her—and showed no surprise. "It was a spaceship that brought our ancestors here, hundreds of years ago," she said softly. "Oh, you're wonderful to come after your wife all alone like this. How romantic!"

The steady sea breeze had almost dried them by the time she was leading him into her three-room home. He remembered the sign ROOM TO LET in its window. "It *was* Rowland's room," she said softly.

Her mother, a pleasant, matronly woman, listened to his story, but looked doubtful. "We'll get into trouble harbouring him," she pointed out apologetically. "I can't take that sign down without reporting our new lodger's name."

This opposition seemed to decide the girl's mind. Her hand crept into Robin's. "All right mother. But just you say nothing."

In the street outside, she smiled adoringly at Robin. "I don't know what we'll do, but I'm going to help you. What's your name, Spaceman?"

He told her. Flattered, but uneasy as he thought of the mother knowing too much behind them and the daughter looking at him as though he were something special, he lost no time in explaining how he might use his Locator to find his wife.

"Right!" she said. "Oh, you wonderful man!" She pouted. "Your Sue must be oh! so proud of you."

She knew the layout of City like she knew the dimples of her pretty face. Now travelling by moving belts on almost deserted subways, now taking short cuts through underground roads that carried food supplies and the goods of the factories for distribution or embarkation, now dodging a patrolling policeman in the unsleeping streets, they covered the entire island, and ended up on the further coast.

"It's no use," she said wearily, "they must have taken her to Assembly Isles."

He bit his lip. 5 a.m. is the time of night when human drive is at its lowest ebb.

He stared at a dump of crates that were being loaded by cranes into a ship. It was not a long voyage. Might he not stow away? "What d'you suppose is in those?"

"All kinds of things, I expect," she said. "A lot of bits and pieces we've been making to the specifications of the dedicated ones. They've kept us especially busy just lately."

"Are they making something special then?"

"I've told you before I don't know—but I've heard it said we've been neglecting other work. And I myself was switched from canning food to packaging a new kind of food concentrate, if that means anything to you."

He stared out over the sea to where sunrise silhouetted the rocky isles upon the horizon, and wondered. Light sparkled on the endlessly rolling water which, like a vast moat, lapped against the concrete harbour.

A policeman, swinging a truncheon, came strolling into sight, saw them, and shouted.

"Hey you!"

Robin took to his heels.

The girl kept pace with him. "Hide, Robin!" she panted. "I'll try to draw him off—"

He pelted up the first side street he came to, stopped on the next level, trying to hold his bursting breath while listening to the clatter of her sandals below.

The heavy footfalls of the policeman pounded nearer, hesitated and then faded after the girl's pattering feet.

Robin lifted his hand after her in salutation. She had been very helpful. He hoped she would get away. Then he turned and hurried inland, thankful for a sudden crush of people, who, as indifferent to him as robots, hurried to their work on the early shift.

The sun was just clear of the horizon when he came upon a notice placarded on a wall.

WANTED.

There followed an accurate description of him—and he caught himself hoping that it had been wrung out of the mother of the girl, rather than by force out of the girl herself. Not that such details mattered. Alone on a strange world dedicated to some unknown purpose, he had problems enough to occupy his mind without idle speculation. Similar notices appeared with ever-increasing frequency. He grew used to them, continuing on his way with a desperate boldness that increased in proportion to their numbers. Finding an entrance to one of the underground roads, he stole a lift on a lorry.

Discovering this loaded with ore which, to his surveyor's eye, looked to contain beryl, he found himself wondering what these

islanders could want with the light, corrosion resisting alloys that could be made from beryllium.

In the streets again, he headed for the jetty where he had left Reynard's boat. Evidently the police had been withdrawn to search for him on the other side of the island, for he met none.

With the sail flapping as he tacked away from the bewildering island, he marvelled at his luck. Or was it luck? Dressed as these people were, speaking their language, and having learnt enough of their way of life from the girl and his own experiences to act as they did, he ought to have had more confidence in his ability to pass as one of them.

He altered course to clear the island and looked back from the swaying boat. Was it his imagination or had three other boats also altered course?

He shrugged. Judging by the way the water creamed from their bows, they had the heels of him anyway. All he could do was to continue on his way. Boldness had worked well enough coming back across City island.

Clear of the coast, he turned eastwards and ran before the steady wind, and the other boats kept to their old course. He sighed with relief. There was trouble enough ahead of him.

He looked back into the wind several times to make certain that they no longer followed. And, as they reached his turning point, they also turned. He stared in amazement. They must want him to guess that he was being followed!

He laid out the frogman kit in the bottom of the boat as they slowly overhauled him. But he was curious to discover what they intended. As soon as they were near enough, he hailed them.

"Hello there! What do you want of me?"

"I am Reynard!" the answer floated across the rolling water. "Join forces with us, Spaceman! Perhaps we can both gain what we want by helping each other."

"Keep your distance!" he warned. "Remember I am armed."

He watched them shorten sail.

"Not even you can land on Assembly Isles in daylight!" warned Reynard in turn. He stood, swaying with the motion of his boat, upon the coaming of her bows.

Robin admired the piratical confidence of the man's stance. "What do you propose?"

"You want your woman, Spaceman—and my people need freedom from the yoke of Captain Pompey. Help us break his power and you can have your woman with our blessing."

"Are you proposing I take part in a rebellion?"

"Why not? Without Pompey to say no, my people could expand on to Assembly Isles. Plenty of unused room on them. You've seen how crowded City is." Reynard laughed mockingly. "I don't see you have any option. I'll wager you don't even know which island holds Pompey."

That was true enough. In fact the whole idea seemed logical. There was nothing in the Survey Code which might forbid such a course of action. Such things were left to the discretion of the Surveyors. He could even remember one man being promoted because just such a rebellion had opened the way for the Empire. Yes, and with aid, he might easily succeed, when failure seemed so certain alone. Even if he managed to rescue Sue, he did not fancy the possibility of being chased back, all the long way to those radio-active islands, where he would have to hold his pursuers off until his spaceboat could be recalled.

"I agree!" he called. "Come close, but don't forget I am armed."

"We remember." Reynard laughed wolfishly. "We've tasted the power of your sting, Spaceman. Otherwise, why do you think we have waited an entire night to meet you and offer ourselves as allies?"

Some twelve hours later, as Robin towed Reynard through black, rolling water towards the forbidding outline of the southern Assembly Isle, he reflected how he would have scoffed, three days ago, if Sue had suggested he might lead a gang of cut-throats in an attack on some local despot.

He cut off his suit-jets some way out. They swam in together and crawled up a short beach into the cover of some rocks. A glance at his Locator's needle pointing steadily inland dispelled the last of Robin's doubts.

Reynard touched his arm. "There's the path the guards take."

Robin saw it, the white of concrete in the deepening dusk of the long twilight. They crept towards it. "No killing, remember!" he cautioned.

Reynard laughed softly. "Not if it can be helped—listen!"

They shrank into the shadows.

Two men came strolling along the path, weapons at the trail, talking together carelessly.

"You take the nearer one," whispered Reynard. "Now!"

Robin leapt. With a choking gasp, the man went down beneath him. Robin, thinking of Sue a prisoner, whacked down the butt of his blaster. The man went limp.



Robin turned. Reynard was getting to his feet. "Good work, Spaceman."

"You haven't killed yours? "

"No, it was not necessary." Reynard chuckled, mocking Robin's squeamishness as he dragged his victim's wrists and ankles together.

Robin peered warily around.

Starlight glinted on metal and he picked up one of the weapons dropped by the guards. It felt familiar in his hand. A stun rifle, heavy with its batteries—just what they needed. "Reynard—" He hesitated. It was different from the one he had left behind in the spaceboat because it seemed too bulky for his purpose.

It looked like one of an obsolete type that he had seen in a museum somewhere; yet it was obviously new. Since these people had been cut off from their own kind on this planet for hundreds of years, it must have been made by them here as a replacement for a worn out weapon. Perhaps it had come from the factories of City in parts—machined by workers ignorant of what they were actually making—and had been put together here. These two islands were called Assembly Isles.

Reynard looked up. "What have you got there? "

Robin explained the value of the rifles and Reynard chuckled over

them in the dark. "You use them so—eh? Good. Now shine your light for the others to come."

Like a pack of sea-wolves they came prowling out of the sea. Robin's innate respect for law and order worried his conscience as they advanced up steps cut in the cliff. Half way up, they found a guard house. Bursting in upon sleepy men, they made the conflict brutal and brief.

"So easy!" exulted Reynard. "We should have done this long ago. Quickly now."

Caution cast to the winds they raced up the remaining steps. At the top, a sudden view of the extent of the island took Robin's breath away. An initial success meant little, he feared, as he recalled the buildings between these stark crags.

"Get off the skyline, you fool!" urged Reynard.

Another voice called. "Who's there?"

"Charge!" yelled Reynard. Guns stabbed flame and the stun rifles crackled amidst the explosions. Robin found himself swept along with the mad rush. Men seemed to go down in the dark before them.

"This way!" yelled Reynard and they stumbled over rough ground towards a large, square shape that suddenly took on the appearance of a building with lighted windows.

A group of men, standing in the out-streaming light turned to look at them.

"That's him!" howled Reynard. "Pompey's the one with the white hair."

And then—

The air rocked. A flat-topped blaze grew upon the other island, throwing all the crags into brilliance against the dark sea and sky. The blaze lengthened and a shadowy something—seemingly balanced above it—lifted up and up until it was level with them, over their heads, presenting its dazzling tail towards them, higher, higher, dwindling into the night.

Noise faded. Behind, at the scene of the recent conflict, a man moaned and the moan choked off. An instant's silence became filled with the heavy breathing of men recovering from surprise. A tired, but fiercely jubilant voice croaked: "Well, it's gone. At last That final atomic test did give us the knowledge. And now the workers will stop their stupid grumbling because we wouldn't let them use those little islands as living space. Short-sighted fools that they are."

Shadows faded into the gloom as glare faded.

"What was it, Pompey?" muttered Reynard. "Whatever was it?"

The old man's white hair moved in the darkness. "What? Then who are you that you call me by name, yet do not recognise what we have just seen?"

"I am Reynard the Fox!" declared the outlaw with a reviving bluster. "You! You are my prisoner!"

"Prisoner? Ha! But I thought you were the Spaceman coming after his wife. . ."

"I'm here," said Robin. He turned his torch full on the old man.

Pompey narrowed arrogant eyes, drew himself up—very erect in spite of the frailty of his great age—clenched his fists, then smiled ingratiatingly into the light. He waved towards the lighted windows of the fortress-like building behind them. "Enter, Spaceman. I will explain to you."

"You're my prisoner!" snarled Reynard, but the very edge on his tone hinted at inward doubt. "I give the orders, now."

"Do you, indeed?" murmured Pompey. "I am old and have been standing long enough—and I find that night air chill. But—Well?" He ended with the crack of a whip in his voice. "What are your orders?"

Reynard flinched; physical violence he could have handled.

Pompey's laughter cackled out. "Fool! What can you do on your own? Nothing. . . " he sneered. "You are a common nobody! You do not know that all these centuries have brought their reward. My great-great-great-great grandfather would be proud of us all—except such as you!"

"Proud of. . . " Reynard sounded lost.

The old man beckoned imperiously. "Come!"

In a large, brilliantly lit hall he sank with a sigh on a tall-backed chair and relaxed—completely indifferent to the presence of the brown, lean, seamen outlaws armed to the teeth. Robin looked around the others crowding in. Men in laboratory smocks or overalls—grinning in triumph and as careless of the recent bloodshed as the outlaws of their master—they showed all the thoughtless arrogance of the worst type of aristocracy.

Pompey stiffened erect. "This began nearly four hundred years ago." Ignoring Reynard, he addressed Robin with eyes almost hypnotic under white brows and face alight with the consciousness of achievement. "A ship was evacuating six thousand refugee workers and some fifty scientists and engineers from a front line planet, when it became involved in a great battle and was badly damaged. Breaking

free of the action, it succeeded in reaching this outlying Sun. It attempted to land on the other planet of this system, but its engines were getting out of control. The Captain—*his* name was Pompey—crashlanded it upon one of the rocky islets near the only habitable island on this watery outer planet, because that was all he could do.

"The people all got safely clear, though some died later from exposure to radiation coming from the burst engines. Much of the equipment was also saved, although the ship itself was a total loss. And, then and there, the Captain and scientists determined not to let the people revert to savagery, and instead swore to build a new rocket.

"The regime they set up has continued until this very day. Rulers and scientists must live sheltered lives—and thus they were segregated from the common herd upon these Assembly Isles. Most people—"

"I want to talk to you about that," broke in Robin. He did not like this talk about ordinary people and specialists. "There's a girl back on City—"

"Later!" said the old man, abruptly imperious. "Some change will be possible, now

"But to get back to my story. Most people just want to live ordinary lives to work and have a little relaxation. Only the Captain—my ancestor—and the scientists and engineers had the ability and tenacity to work for the long-term realisation of what you have just witnessed. And it has, in fact, taken very much longer than even they ever dreamed. The common people had to be trained. Ship stores would not last for ever, and we had to become self-sufficient and be able to get our food and all other needs from this watery planet. Ships had to be built and surveys made. Ores and materials had to be found and the techniques of underwater mining learned. Factories had to be built and people taught to work in them. All the materials used in the original ship could not be found and substitutes had to be devised.

"And all the time the people—and ourselves here—had to be clothed and fed and amused. The original six thousand workers were not nearly enough. Six thousand people could not support themselves while they found and smelted and machined the materials to make a single ship for water—let alone the special materials for a ship of Space. Only now, after four centuries, with our population increased to over twenty million, have we at last succeeded in our task."

Robin took a deep breath. It was impossible not to feel some admiration for such a great effort; yet for a few humans to enslave their fellows for hundreds of years—even to such an ultimately beneficial end as this—was not his idea of how people should live. There

was a better way, surely .

"You will understand, now, Spaceman," Pompey was continuing in an apologetic manner patently very difficult to him, "why we had to keep our secret from you—and, through you, from the rest of the Galaxy for just two more short days? We wish to be friends with you, and to trade with other worlds, but, after all that sustained effort, we could not permit you to spoil our small triumph, could we? It would have been too much of an anti-climax if you just came drifting down to regard our rocket as commonplace . "

"I suppose so," Robin admitted. It was something that these people had forgotten the enmities of war; but with such a ruthless determination and organising capacity concentrated in a despotic ruling class, they were still disturbing.

Pompey's gnarled finger beckoned him across the room. "Lean down, Spaceman. I desire to whisper and am too old to raise myself for you."

Robin leaned.

"A wonderful woman, your wife," whispered Pompey, leering. "Such spirit! If I were younger, I'd use her to found a dynasty on a new planet out there in Space. I come of a breed that takes what it wants. But I haven't the stamina, now. No, I haven't the stamina."

A fervent exclamation was on Robin's lips when he heard a familiar step behind him.

The old man's eyes moved and glinted with appreciation.

Reynard the Fox seemed for a moment to forget the dilemma of his own situation and grinned hungrily.

Every other man was staring with frank admiration.

Then Sue was in Robin's arms and her lips were whispering against his ear. "Thank God you've come! I've been so frightened in this horrible place."

Over her golden head, his eyes sought Pompey's, and what he saw in them made him realise how good it was to have been born in a free society where all men and women had opportunities—instead of having to bow to the will of a Dictator.

Then he noticed that Reynard had moved behind the high backed chair and that his outlaws had formed a menacing ring around Pompey's men. Perhaps the regime was coming to an end logically enough now that it had served its purpose.

The Window

Whichever way you looked at it, the window had curious properties. Did it also foretell an alien invasion?

Illustrated by John F. Greengrass

The house had been there for a long time. It was out of place in that drab, suburban street, had nothing in common with the depressingly monotonous semi-detached villas—put up by some speculative builder of the Middle Twenties in a singularly uninspired moment—on either side of it. It was, I thought, late Eighteenth Century, but I could have been wrong. I'm no architect.

It was close on midnight, in winter, when I walked along that street. The old fashioned gas lamps on their iron lamp posts were gleaming with that peculiar, yellowish green light that only gas can give. Had this been the only illumination I should never have seen the house, but a full moon was riding high above the thin overcast and, in spite of the thin, chill drizzle, visibility was fairly good.

I was lost. I had been to visit an old friend whom I had not seen for years, with whom I had lost touch after the war finished. I had run into him, quite by chance, in the city. He had asked me to come to his home to meet his wife and children, to take pot luck. I thought that I had noted all the salient features along the route during our walk from the Underground station to his house and so, when he offered to accompany me back to the station, I had refused, not wishing to drag him away from his warm fireside.

And so I was lost.

I must have walked for miles in this suburban wilderness. I had tried to retrace my footsteps to my friend's house, but had succeeded

only in becoming more hopelessly bewildered. I had looked up at the sky, hoping that a break in the overcast would give me a glimpse of familiar stars and, with it, some idea of direction. But all I ever saw was the silhouettes of chimneys and television aerials against the pale glow of light reflected from the underside of the low clouds. There were no passers by of whom I could enquire the way to the nearest bus stop (but the buses must long since have stopped running) or Underground Station. There were no policemen.

It would have been commonsense to have knocked at somebody's door, when I first realised that I was lost, to appeal for directions. But now it was too late to think of that. The lights were all out in downstairs windows and most of the bedrooms were in darkness. Weary and miserable as I was, I was not sufficiently desperate as to consider disturbing suburban householders. Even so, it was with considerable relief that I saw that the house—the old, out-of-place house—still showed a gleam of light from a side window towards the back. (It was that gleam of light that I first noticed—the oddity of its architectural style and period occurred to me later.)

I crossed the road to the gate—a heavy and incongruously ornate wrought iron affair—and, with chilled, numb hands, fumbled with the catch. It was very stiff, but it gave at last. The gate was stiff, too, and its gudgeons and pintles squealed in rusty protest as I pushed it open.

The front door was under a sort of portico, and so shielded from the diffused light of the moon and the more direct glare of the street lamps. I fumbled around, trying to find a bell push. Finally, assuming that my cold hands had lost their sense of touch, I pulled a box of matches out of my pocket and struck a light. By the brief, flickering illumination I saw that there was no bell push. All that there was was a large knocker, an elaborate affair made in the likeness of a goat's head.

I lifted it, let it fall. The noise that it made seemed unnecessarily loud. Feeling very foolish I rapped sharply with it two or three times. I waited, then, listening for the sound of footsteps coming to the door. I rehearsed in my mind what I would say: *Excuse me, I know that I've got a nerve knocking you up at this time of night, but could you direct me to the nearest Underground Station?*

I knocked again.

And again.

As often happens on such occasions a certain feeling composed of both stubbornness and resentment was beginning to manifest itself. I was beginning to get annoyed with the occupants of the house. After

all—despite the lateness of the hour—they weren't in bed; there was still a light on downstairs. Or, even if they were, for some reason, using a lower room as a bedroom they weren't asleep.

I knocked again.

This is absurd, I told myself. I'm tired and I'm cold, and my feet are damp. I'm lost in the wilds of North West Greater London. I don't want much—all I want is somebody to tell me where I am and how to get the hell out of here . .

I thought, *The back door. Perhaps if I try the back door they'll hear me .*

The path round to the back was overgrown with weeds, and muddy and slippery. I cursed as a gout of near-freezing water from a deep puddle slopped up inside my shoe. It seemed to take much longer than it should have done for me to get even as far as the window.

I didn't mean to look in the window. I'm no Peeping Tom. I don't think that I would have looked in if I hadn't slipped again, falling, and twisting as I fell. When I recovered I found that I had both hands against the rough brick of the wall to steady myself and that my nose was pressed against the cold glass.

It's some sort of Lodge meeting, I thought. I shouldn't be watching this . .

Around the room were candles, at least two dozen of them, each burning with a steady blue flame. And they were held aloft by men and women, robed and cowed in black. Other men and women, their hands unencumbered, were going through the slow motions of what seemed to be some sort of ritual dance.

Then they fell back, towards the walls, towards the candle bearers, and I saw the altar. I saw the figure of the Horned God over the altar—and on the altar itself pale, naked flesh .

I stared, fascinated. It began to make sense—an insane sort of sense. The altar with the Horned God over it, the living, naked woman spreadeagled upon it . . And it made sense, too, when one of the cowed figures produced from somewhere what I thought, at first, was a small animal of some kind and threw it down on the living altar cloth. I saw the upraised knife gleam—and then, with a sudden, sickening shock I realised that the sacrifice was a child.

I yelled out—but those inside the room didn't hear me. Slowly, making hieratic gestures as they moved, they stepped from their positions along the walls, ranged themselves so that they were facing the altar. They hid from sight what was being done.

I hammered on the unyielding glass with my fists. At last I slipped my shoe off, beat the window with the heel of it—but rubber

made no more impression than flesh and bone had done. I was still hammering when the ranks of the worshippers parted to let through the tall, black robed figure of the evil priest. He was carrying the knife in his hand still, and it was dripping blood. His cowl had been thrown back.

He saw me. For long seconds his burning, deepset eyes glared into mine with hypnotic intensity. It was only when his gaze shifted downwards—he seemed to be studying every detail of my clothing—that I was able to study his face. It was in shadow (the candles were all behind him)—but I was able to see the silvery hair, the strong, lined features, the great jutting beak of a nose.

He made some gesture—a complicated seeming series of passes and gesticulations. He seemed to lose interest in me and then, abruptly, turned away. The ranks of worshippers opened to let him through as he strode back to the altar.

I don't remember running back into the road—although I do remember the solid, comforting figure of the policeman with whom I collided. He must have thought at first that I was drunk—and I must have looked—and sounded—as though my drinking had carried me to the state of delirium tremens. Besides—one of my shoes was missing.

"What's all this?" he asked. "What's all this?"

"Murder!" I gasped. "There! In the old house!"

"The old house . . ." he said slowly. "The old Lodge."

"You must believe me!" I cried.

"Yes," he said abruptly. "But you won't believe what *you* will see."

He led the way through the open gate, along the path. The beam of his torch picked out my shoe, still lying in the mud.

"You'd better put it on," he said.

When I had straightened up, after a struggle with the wet shoelace, I saw that he had thrown the beam of his light on to the window. The glass was opaque. I thought at first that somebody inside had pulled a blind down, but this was not so. The window, somehow, had lost its transparency.

"Come round to the back," he said. "I found out how to open this door, when I was a kid. I still can."

"Have you a warrant?" I asked absurdly.

"Of course not. And if—if—there's been a murder I shan't need one."

It didn't take him long to open the door.

The house smelled of age and neglect. The beam of the torch

fell on bare floors and walls. I heard the rustling scuffle of rats or mice in the wainscoting. But, so far as human life was concerned, the house was dead.

"Is this the room?" asked the constable.

"It . . . It could be," I said doubtfully.

It was the right size—large enough to hold a small dance in. But the thick dust on the floor was undisturbed. There was no altar—but over the fireplace, painted on the wall, was the Horned God. It was obvious that attempts had been made to paint it over—but the colours were still bright and fresh—too bright and fresh—and the eyes in the bearded face seemed to gleam evilly.

I walked to the window.

"But I can see through it," I said.

"Yes. It's one way glass."

"They'd never heard of polarisation when this house was built," I said.

"Hadn't they?" asked the policeman. "They used it, though, in this room. It's unbreakable, too."

"I want to see the rest of the house," I said.

"All right. I'm getting paid for this—you're not."

At last we were out in the road again. I wasn't sorry when the constable suggested that I should accompany him to the Police Station. At least I should be able to sit down—and, perhaps, I might even get a mug of tea.

"So you've seen our haunted house," said the Sergeant. "It's some time since anybody has actually seen anything—although it's just impossible, even in these days, to find a tenant for it. The kids steer well clear of it, too—and usually an empty house is paradise to them."

"I hope I'm not telling tales out of school," I said, "but the constable said that he'd picked the lock and broken in when he was a small boy . . ."

"Quite likely so—but I bet he did it just once. There's something about the house that scares even children off. And dogs. And cats."

"But not mice or rats."

"They're different."

"Do you know anything of the history of the place?"

"Yes. It was built long before the tide of bricks and mortar had flooded over this part of the countryside. It was a rich man—of course—who owned it; Israel Penwarden. He'd made his money

making glass, and was somewhat of a dabbler in all the arts and sciences. We do know that he was mixed up with one of those gangs of decadent aristocrats that played around with the Black Mass and such . . .”

I remember the face of the man I had seen, the man with the bloody knife .

“I thought that it was an unfrocked priest who was supposed to celebrate the Black Mass,” I said.

“Penwarden was qualified,” said the Sergeant. “He entered Holy Orders as a young man—but his conduct was a little too much even for those tolerant times. Anyhow—you’re the third person—as far as our records show—who’s actually *seen* anything. Your account tallies with the others. By the way—after the first time the ‘murder’ was reported we did go so far as to dig up the garden. We found bones, human bones. Small ones . . .”

“They must have been devils in those days!” I said.

“Must they?” asked the Sergeant, surprisingly philosophical. “Are we so much better now? After all—old Penwarden and his pals did their murders as a sacrifice to a God in whom they believed. Can you say as much for the airman who drops an atomic bomb on women and children? Could you say as much for Hitler’s S.S. men with their mass slaughtering of Jews—men, women and (once again) children? Are we, in this Twentieth Century, any better than those old Satanists?”

I was too tired for discussions of this kind. The hot, sweet, strong tea which at first had revived me now seemed to have made me drowsy.

“If it’s all right with you, Sergeant,” I said, “I’ll be getting along.”

He looked at the clock.

“Yes. The first train’ll be running soon. I’ll walk along with you to the Underground Station just so you don’t get lost again.” He got to his feet. “Oh, by the way—have you any objection if I pass your name and address on to a friend of mine? He’s a member of the Society for Psychic Research and *very* keen on haunted houses and such.”

“That will be all right,” I said. “And I hope that he lays the ghost.”

That very next evening I heard from the Sergeant’s friend. I was just settling down nicely to an evening of writing—I wanted to

get a story finished and in the mail to my agent the following morning—when the telephone bell rang.

I picked up the instrument, gave my name and number.

"Penwarden here," said a voice.

For a moment I thought, crazily, of time travel, thought that the old scientist and Satanist had perfected some means of speaking across the centuries.

"Penwarden?" I asked stupidly.

"Yes. Penwarden. You've never heard of me, but Sergeant Brown gave me your name and address and telephone number. You told him that he could. Remember?"

"Yes. I remember. It was the coincidence of the names that gave me a shock."

"Oh, that. The old boy was an ancestor of mine as a matter of fact. Anyhow, do you mind if I come round to see you tonight? We have a rather interesting investigation under way—and you can help." His voice became persuasive. "It's all material, you know."

"All right," I told him. "You know the way, don't you? Russell Square's the handiest Underground Station. You get out there and . . ."

"I'll manage," he said. "I know Bloomsbury."

He hung up, and I started work again. I'd written no more than a couple of pages when I heard him knocking on the door. I got up from my work table and let him in. As we shook hands I studied him carefully. He had the great nose that I had seen upon his ancestor's face, otherwise he was most undistinguished looking. He could have been any age between the middle twenties and the late thirties—his sandy hair was thinning but his pale blue eyes were surprisingly youthful. He was carrying a portfolio.

I helped him off with his overcoat, seated him in one of the two chairs by the gas fire. I poured drinks.

"Now," I said, "what's all this about?"

"There's something odd about that house—about that window especially . . ."

"You're telling *me*!"

"What I mean," he said carefully, "is that there's something far more odd about it than mere ghosts. . ."

"They're odd enough," I said.

"Are they?" The look he gave me implied that he didn't think them so.

"I suppose that you're descended from the Penwarden who owned the house," I went on.



He rubbed his nose with his forefinger.

"There *is* a resemblance, I suppose," he said. "Talking of resemblances . . ." He picked his portfolio up from the floor, opened it. He pulled out a sheet of stiff paper, yellowed with age. He handed it to me. "What do you make of *this*?"

This was a portrait, done in black ink. It was not a flattering one. It showed a man, his face contorted with terror, holding a shoe in his right hand as though to strike with it. Certain features—not of the man's face, but of his clothing—had been emphasised—his hat, his collar and necktie, the watch on his left wrist.

"Does it remind you of anyone?" asked Penwarden.

"Yes . . . It's familiar, somehow, but . . ."

"Could it be . . . *you*?"

"Why, yes! Last night . . . But how . . .?"

"It's a long story. Anyhow, not long after my revered ancestor achieved a certain notoriety, the family left England. They went, first of all, to the American colonies. Later some of them left America for Australia. I am, I suppose, the first of the Penwardens to set foot in the Old Country for well over a century. There's money in wool, and I thought I might as well blow some of it.

"I was rather interested in tracing all the family connections

and so on. I was lucky enough to find, in the custody of a firm of solicitors here in London, a box full of old Israel's books and papers. That picture of you was in it."

"Impossible!"

"It was there."

"It could have been faked."

"It wasn't. You can keep that picture if you like. Get the ink and the paper analysed. Anyhow, I found out a lot about my ancestor. He made glass. He knew Dean Swift. "

"What's Dean Swift got to do with it?"

"You've read *Gulliver's Travels*, haven't you? You remember the flying island, whose learned inhabitants knew that the planet Mars had two moons? They knew, and Swift knew (after all, they were his characters)—but no astronomer of that time had even dreamed that Mars has satellites. He made some odd glass—as you know—did old Israel. He may have made a telescope. But it's that one way glass of his that's . . . fascinating. Look at these! "

He opened the portfolio again. The first sketch that he showed me depicted a group of near naked savages attacking a large animal with "primitive weapons. An elephant? I looked more closely. Elephants aren't shaggy—and the trees in the background looked to be more part of an English landscape than of the African or Indian jungle. The next one showed a marching column of Roman legionaries. The next one was of three flying things—pterosauria?—in flight over a dismal marsh. They hadn't the stiffness that such pictures usually have. I gained the impression that the artist had seen the legionaries, the mammoth and the pterodactyls with his own eyes. But that was impossible.

"Well?" I asked.

"From the outside, looking in," said Penwarden. "Your portrait, of course, was from the inside looking out."

"You mean to tell me," I said incredulously, "that your ancestor made some sort of polarised glass that enabled him to see through time?"

"Perhaps he wasn't the only one," said Penwarden. "What about Nostrodamus?"

"Rubbish," I said. "He may have lived long before Darwin—but even in his day geologists were turning up the fossils of various prehistoric monsters, reconstructing them and explaining them away as the remains of beasts that did not survive the Deluge. After all—Noah's Ark must have had a limited cargo capacity "

"What about Nostrodamus?" he asked again.

"What do you mean? You mean that the window is made of *two* way glass?"

"Yes. *These* pictures—the Romans, the mammoth and the flying lizards—are from the outside looking in. What *you* saw was from the outside looking in. But that not very flattering portrait of you is from the *inside* looking out. And so are these."

He produced more sheets of that stiff, yellowed paper.

On the first one was a sketch of an automobile—one of the mechanical monstrosities that chugged along the roads in the years prior to the first World War.

"That was made, of course, when he looked out at this part of London before it was built up, when he had a clear field of view from his window," said Penwarden. "But these others are more interesting."

The next showed what was obviously a modern passenger aircraft flying low on the approach to the airport. It was shewn in some detail, even to the American flag painted on its stabiliser. It was impossible to believe that the man who sketched it had lived in a century when aerial transport was undreamed of.

"A perfectly good Constellation," said Penwarden. "Now—what do you make of these?"

"Flying saucers," I said automatically.

He raised his eyebrows. "Come off it, man. This affair's already fantastic enough without your stirring in your own private brand of fantasy. Oh, I admit that these do give the impression of lenticulate spaceships—but you must remember the conditions in which they were seen. They could be—they *were*—no more than dirigible airships seen beam on. And in the first World War, remember, the Germans sent their Zeppelins over only by night, and the old boy will have seen them only by the glare of the not too efficient searchlights of those days."

"Any more pictures?" I asked.

"Yes. But not here. I brought along only the most convincing ones."

"Just what is all this in aid of?" I demanded.

He grinned. "I can see that you've heard the legend that Australia produces the world's best con men. I assure you that I'm not one. I'm just a grazier who happens to be interested in more things than sheep. I'm interested in ferreting out all the horrid details of my family history. I'd like to find out just why old Israel did commit suicide. And I'd like even more to get the secret of his glass—and a few other things."

"You could get a piece of the glass analysed," I said.

"Could I? For a start, it would mean damaging the window. Taking even a small scraping from it might destroy its properties. Furthermore—people in those days used the oddest ingredients in their manufactured goods. It might well take the world's finest organic chemist a lifetime to duplicate that window exactly. Then there's the psi factor . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"Can *anybody* see through the glass—or only certain people? How much did the Black Mass have to do with it all? What about the candles? (I *think* that I've been able to duplicate them. The things that went into that wax remind me of the Three Witches in *Macbeth* stirring their cauldron . . .)"

"So?"

"So it's our intention to duplicate as closely as possible—we draw the line at human sacrifice, of course—the conditions of Israel's Black Mass. We want somebody who can see through Time—and we know that you can. After all—it's all material for you."

"It'll be better material still, I suppose, if I go to jail with the rest of you."

"There's not much risk of that," he said. "There'll be some quite surprisingly big people taking part in the experiment."

"Another thing," I said. "I was in the house. You must have been in England for some time . . ."

"Almost a year," he admitted.

" . . . and yet the house showed no signs of having been entered."

"It hasn't been," he told me. "I didn't want to disturb anything before the time. As I said—it may all boil down to the operation of some laws of physics we have yet to formulate. On the other hand—the psi factor may be involved." He got to his feet. "I must go now. I'll leave you to think it over. Here's my card, with my telephone number. The experiment takes place a week from now. Don't forget—a week from now."

After he was gone I tried to get some more work done, but it was hopeless. Besides, I was still tired. I treated myself to a stiff drink and then went to bed.

I decided to participate in the experiment. I have never been one of those holding that odd idea that "there are some things we aren't meant to know." The one thing that did put me off was a certain amount of just plain, old fashioned fear—fear of the consequences should the police get wind of what would almost certainly

be a session of obscene and sacrilegious tomfoolery. But I consoled myself with the thought that going to jail for participating in Black Magical rites is rather more glamorous than going to jail for—say— theft, and doesn't carry quite the same stigma. I rang Penwarden and told him he could count me in.

I thought that he would be round to see me again before the night of the Black Mass, but he wasn't. He told me when he came to call for me on the evening in question that he had been very busy getting everything ready, and that one of his biggest problems had been to find an unfrocked priest willing to officiate. There were plenty such, he said, who'd have done it if it had been a plain, straightforward ritual with the intention only of paying service to Lucifer. It was the experimental angle, the scientific side of it, that put them off—it was, to them, tantamount to blasphemy.

He called for me, I say, on the evening in question. I asked him, half seriously, what I should wear for the occasion, and he told me that all that had been taken care of. We had a drink together and then we left my flat and climbed into his big, expensive car. We soon got clear of the city and were rolling at a good speed past the clean, modern factories along the Great West Road.

It was a night such as that on which I had first seen the house, but darker, the moon being past its full. I asked Penwarden if it made any difference, and he replied that he didn't think so, that his ancestor had celebrated the Black Mass at any time that was convenient to him, by day or night, and always seemed to have obtained results of some kind.

With Penwarden piloting we navigated the confusion of brick-bound channels, the drab, suburban streets, without much trouble. When we reached the house we found that there were already half a dozen cars parked in the road outside. And the building itself looked far more alive than it had done—there were lights shining from all the windows and smoke was curling from the chimney.

The Australian had his own key, let us in at the front door. Dust still lay thick everywhere but it had been disturbed by the passage of many feet. There was an oil lamp—one of the modern kind with an incandescent mantle—hanging over the staircase up which Penwarden led me. There were two more such lamps in the large upstairs room where the others were waiting for us.

This room was bare, but clean. There were a couple of folding tables and a number of folding chairs. On one of the tables there was writing material, on the other photographic equipment. But I

was, naturally, more interested in the people with whom we should be working.

There was a startlingly lovely girl—slim and blonde and exquisitely dressed—who would be, I hoped, the woman on the altar. (She wasn't.) There were two shaggily tweeded middle-aged females, typical lady professors. There were three men, bespectacled, also in shaggy tweeds. There was a tall, quietly dressed Negro, ascetic features and grey, almost white, hair. There were four men who could have been senior civil servants, and with them was another man whose face I thought I recognised—but dismissed as preposterous the idea that a Minister of the Crown, even a Junior Minister, should be mixed up in an affair like this. There was a little round man with haunted eyes and a too gaudy tie and waistcoat.

There were no introductions.

"Are we all here?" asked Penwarden.

"All but the Colonel," said the slim, blonde girl in a bored voice.

"We'll start without him, then," said Penwarden.

"And lose his backing?" asked one of the civil servants. "We'd better wait."

"All right," said Penwarden. But he looked at his watch.

"What about a drink?" asked the little round man.

"After the ceremony, Father," said the Negro, using the title contemptuously.

Somebody was knocking at the door. Penwarden left us and clattered downstairs. He returned with a fat man who could have sat as a model for Low's Colonel Blimp—but I don't think that even Low could have got on paper the intelligence that shone from his bleak grey eyes.

We left the room then and adjourned to two smaller rooms—the women to one and the men to another. "There's no need to undress," Penwarden told us. "Just slip the robes on over your clothing. The candles are in that box there."

"What about the sacrifice?" asked the Colonel.

"In the hamper."

"Penwarden," I said, "if you're going to .

He laughed. "Of course I'm not. Look!" He opened the lid of the hamper. Inside was a white cock, its feet trussed, its red eyes glaring at us balefully. "I hope it will work. It should. After all, it was always the standard sacrifice at Obeah rites. . ."

"And still is," said the Negro.

"Good. Are you all ready?"

He went to the box and pulled out the tall, thin candles one by

one, lighting them as he did so. They burned with a pale blue flame and stank abominably—sulphur and sickly sweet scent, burning flesh, roses and carrion.

"You," he said to me, "will be stationed by the window. Don't cry out, whatever you see. Don't interrupt the service. Just remember all that you see—and get it down on paper as soon as possible afterwards."

"What about the cameras and such?"

"We'll not use 'em tonight. They might, somehow, ruin the effect. But there'll be plenty of other times."

Feeling fools (at least, I did) in our long, black cowled robes we filed out into the passageway, each of us holding his candle aloft. We were joined there by the three women. Carrying the bound cock—which was beginning to make raucous protest—Penwarden led the way down the wide staircase, into the room in which I had seen the Black Mass served by his ancestor.

The partly obscuring paint had been cleaned away from the vivid and frightening picture of the Horned God. Beneath him the altar had been restored. One of the women slowly let drop her robe; she was naked beneath it. Ungracefully she hoisted her sagging, lumpy body on to the flat surface, stretched out. The spectacle was remarkably unaphrodisiac.

I stood by the window, looking out. All I could see was the high hedge forming the boundary of the next door neighbour's garden and, above it, the silhouette of roof top and chimney pot and drunkenly sagging television aerial against the faintly glowing sky. There was a distant throbbing, felt rather than heard, and the winking white, red and green navigation lights of an inward bound airliner drifted across my field of vision.

Behind me they were singing, and I could hear the shuffle of their feet as they paced through the measures of some ritual dance. I felt no desire to turn to watch them. It would be a shoddily unconvincing parody of what I had already seen. But that low voiced chant sent icy fingers rippling up and down my spine. *Latin?* I wondered. *But aren't they supposed to sing the words backwards, or something?* The cock let loose an unearthly screech, and I shuddered as I thought of its hot blood—black in the eerie blue light—pouring over the white, unlovely body of the woman on the altar. The bird screeched again.

Outside was the night. Outside were hedge top and roof top and lopsided St. Andrew's cross. The airliner was no longer in sight, must already be touching down at the London Airport. Inside were



a group of allegedly rational adults playing a game that must have been invented by a vicious and halfwitted child.

But there was compulsion in the rhythm of that chant, something hypnotic. I could not understand the words with my conscious mind but, somehow, they seemed to wrench something deep down inside me, seemed to probe and twist. I felt myself swaying where I stood, put out my hands to the wall to steady myself. Outside the window the outlines of roof top and chimney pot softened and wavered. It was as though I was looking at them through flowing water.

Involuntarily I shut my eyes—then opened them again cautiously. The others, I was sure, had noticed nothing; their chant continued, its rhythm unbroken. But outside it was now broad daylight, the sun riding high in a cloudless sky. Slowly my eyes recovered from their dazzlement. I saw that the hedge was gone, the houses were gone. There was nothing to obstruct vision. I was looking out over a featureless plain. No, not quite featureless. There were stumps that might once have been trees, huddled mounds that could once have been buildings. Over all was a grey, fine ash.

Sickened, I looked up—looked up to the small, circling shapes,

mere specks glinting in the sunlight, high in the blue sky. One of the specks drifted away from the others and fell, trailing a cloud of black smoke. It was followed by a second, and a third. The fourth one fell not far from the house.

The pilot must still have been alive or, perhaps, servo-mechanisms were still functioning. The ship straightened out from its dive, landed almost under control, throwing up a great cloud of the grey dust as it did so. It skidded crazily over the uneven surface then pitched forward on to its sharp nose. In the second or so before it exploded I saw that it was either a rocket or a jet and that there was a red star on each wing tip.

I looked up again. The battle seemed to be over. Slowly, deliberately, four ships were drifting down. Four ships, saucer-shaped, metallically gleaming. I remembered old Israel Penwarden's sketches then, and the things that his descendant had told me must be German Zeppelins. I remembered that old Penwarden was said to have committed suicide.

Lower drifted the strange ships. From hatches in their bellies swarmed tiny, winged shapes, circling, gliding down to the earth like sycamore seeds.

It may have been a man who looked in on us, just as I had looked in on Israel Penwarden and his fellow Satanists. It may have been; the Colonel and one or two of the others are sure that it was and that my story is reliable only up to the crashing of the plane with the red star on its wings. But they didn't see him.

It may have been a man who raised that odd, complicated weapon in one of his right hands and fired at me. (Did the window actually travel in Time? How was it that the dazzling blast from the gun shattered it beyond repair, fused it beyond hope of analysis, the noise of its destruction bringing the others crowding around me, grotesque in their cowed robes, the woman from the altar obscene in her blood spattered nakedness?)

It may have been a man clad in radiation armour, and with a pair of mechanical wings strapped to his back.

It may have been.

But men don't have six many-jointed limbs where their arms should be, neither do they have huge, crimson, faceted eyes.

And so Farewell

His dream had been realised—but a paltry ten years too late

The stars were vivid points of iridescent light in the icy blackness of space, and the cold beauty of the panorama seemed to reach in through the thick, transparent window of the space station, making Marlow shiver slightly as he watched.

Against the brilliant backcloth of deep space, glinting silver as she reflected the light of Sol's fiery globe, lay the Ship. The long arm of the metal corridor connecting her to the station stretched like an umbilical cord away to the right of the window.

Marlow moved nearer to the transparent plastiglass, gliding easily under the one fifth Terran gravity of the outer rim, until he could take in the whole brilliant picture, corridor, ship and space, without the distraction of the grey metal walls around him. It seemed almost as if he could reach out through the window and take the body of the Ship in one hand, as if it were a child's toy, and the stars were like fireflies that could be pinched out of existence between his thumb and forefinger.

"Dreaming, Harry?" The voice startled him from his reverie, and he turned to find Johnny Barker standing at his shoulder.

Marlow relaxed and smiled. "Yes, Johnny," he replied. "Dreaming."

"What about?"

"Can't you guess?" countered the older man.

Barker's blond head nodded and the blue eyes were grave. "Sure, I can guess. It was a stupid question." He paused, then, "Any regrets?"

"Regrets?" Marlow shrugged wryly, the smile on his lips twisted and humourless. "It's too late for regrets, but—of course I have, hundreds of them. I regret being too old, being too weak. I regret the sons I never had that could have carried on my work and made me feel important. I regret everything, but especially being—useless."

"Not useless, Harry." Barker shook his head emphatically. "Whatever else—not that. No one could ever call you useless."

"I can." The voice was stark and unemotional, it was the voice of a man who speaks a truth known only to himself. "My whole life was dedicated to this moment, my whole being given to it's fulfilment, and it has come ten years too late."

"That's it, that's what I mean, Harry. This is your moment more than anyone else's. Without you it would never have happened, at least, not for another couple of centuries." Barker's gaze followed Marlow's out to where the gleaming thousand foot hull floated easily and beautifully against the blackness and the stars. "I know you want to come along, so does every other space man in the system. But you've got something that the others can never have. You have the satisfaction of knowing that you were the beginning, that without you it could not have happened in our lifetime."

Marlow smiled again, but his lips were stiff and bloodless. "All my life I'd counted on this moment as being my swansong, my last throw of the dice. A couple of years in deep space, right outside the system, where no man has ever been before, and after that—" he flicked his fingers expressively, "Finish. Caput."

There was a long silence. Barker could find no words that could meet the occasion, and for Marlow the gleaming vision of the

Ship was, for the moment, his entire existence. He stirred at last and turned a quizzical eye on the younger man. "How do you feel, Johnny? Nervous?"

"Scared stiff." Barker's grin was boyish and almost shy.

"No need to be. The Ship's as near perfect as she can be. It'll be like riding in a taxi."

"Sure, it's easy for you," replied Barker. "You've done it all, and it's behind you. You can look back on your fears and laugh at them, and you can glory in your achievements at the same time because they're real and no one can take them away. With me," he grinned, "I could die in two hours with nothing accomplished and with no one to care. But you're here, Harry. For you it's over, you're at the end of the line." He pursed his lips and frowned in sudden anger. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean it to sound like that."

"I know, but you're right," smiled Marlow. "I've only got my memories of old fears and apprehensions. With you they're real now, but in a couple of hours they won't be. You'll be in space with the Ship humming around you, and you'll trust her, and feel comforted by her. She'll be warm and tight against the cold of space, and you'll forget then, you'll have no need for fear."

The sudden warning buzz of the loudspeaker above their heads caused them to look up expectantly.

"Crew to flight stations." The time honoured order, a throw back to the days of atmospheric flight, was thrice repeated, and it rang down the metal corridors of the station and echoed in the empty circuit of the outer rim. As it died away an empty silence seemed to pervade everything, as if the final trumpet had sounded its last note and was now silenced for ever.

Marlow stood very still for a long minute, while emotion chased emotion through his bent and ageing body. The thrill that the time had come mingled with the dead knowledge that soon it would be gone, and even the small satisfaction of its presence would be taken from him. He felt empty, as if his life was draining away through his wrinkled skin.

"This is it, Harry."

He turned his head and saw Barker offering his hand. He took it and looked searchingly into the other's face. Barker was pale and his hand was damp with the perspiration of apprehensive reaction,

the smile on his face was forced and unreal as he said, "See you in a couple of years."

Marlow smiled in return. "So long, Johnny. Remember what I told you, always check your suit before you go outside. It's the finest friend you'll have out there."

That was all, and then Marlow was alone in the bare, grey observation corridor of the outer rim, watching the bulky figure of Barker move easily away along the corridor until, at last, it was lost from sight around the curve of the rim.

A shudder of emotion swept through Marlow's form. "See you in a couple of years." The empty phrase rang in his brain, mocking him with its deception and taunting him with its falseness. He had long outlived his usefulness, and it was only by the grace of God and the science of man that he was alive now. Thirty odd years of roaming through the Solar System had taken its toll, and his body showed every stress of acceleration which had rocked it, and every breath of sterilised air that it had breathed.

The sum total of his life was written in the lines of his face and in the curve of his body. He knew, all too well, that one day soon his tired and leaking heart would beat its final last frail pulse, and Harold Marlow—sometime rocketeer, explorer, dreamer and madman—would go to his rest.

"You've done it all. It's behind you." He recalled Barker's words and knew, bitterly, the truth of them. In his mind he could see other ships, more than a score of them, each one an improvement on the last, but all of them small death traps even when men were brave, and tiny hells even when they were lucky. He could see the gaunt craters of the Moon, and feel again the soft, prickly pumice dust. The sands of Mars and the red, cloudless sky above them; the swamps of Venus under leaden, teeming skies through which no sun could pierce the heavy, rolling blanket of alien cloud. He had seen them all and laughed his challenge.

Now he would see them no more.

Callisto and Ganymede were lost islands in his life. Titan, Juno, Ceres—the names rang within his mind, each with its own small memory of pleasure or of fear, each one a pushbutton to a half forgotten emotion.

Tears pricked his eyelids and he cursed at his sudden weakness.

"Takeoff in three minutes. All airlocks closed. Clear the connecting corridor."

Through misted eyes Marlow watched the flexible steel corridor come adrift from the Ship and curl away to lie in its appointed place, flat against the outer rim of the station, until it should be wanted again. She floated, brilliant silver, an island now that the cord was cut, an entity apart, like a new born babe ready to take her first faltering step into the unknown.

"One minute."

Even the metallic voice of the speaker seemed to carry the hush of expectation that filtered, nebulous, through every section of the station. It seemed to pervade every rivet and every plate, as if the Universe itself were waiting with baited breath for the moment to come. In Marlow's being there was a disappointment such as he had never known, a longing that was worse than any pangs of hunger or thirst.

"Ten seconds."

Slowly she began to move, turning outwards and away, presenting her blunt stern towards the station. Like a silver fish in a night dark sea she moved on to her course, her speed increasing as the great drive engines pounded their mighty power. She was away now, growing smaller and vanishing with frightening speed. In less than a minute she was no longer visible to the naked eye, and only the mighty instruments of the station could follow her path out of the Solar system.

Marlow swallowed the hard, dry lump in his throat, and squared his shoulders in a brave effort at nonchalance. Far away now, his fears forgotten in the rising wonder of his mission, Barker was looking towards a bright star that was his destiny, wondering what the planets of Centaurus held for him and his twelve companions.

Marlow stood alone in the outer rim of the station. Before him was the ship which he had helped to create, but in which he would never travel. Behind him was the Earth that was his home, but which he could not visit for fear that the awful gravity would snuff out the tiny, tenuous flame of his life. He moved away stiffly from the window, knowing that Mankind's greatest era was beginning as his own life was ending, and that he was only on the outskirts—at the end of the line.

A Date to Remember

*Was his theory merely the ravings of a sickened
mind . . . or perhaps the product of experience?*

Illustrated by Harry Turner

Bell was ostensibly reading *The Week in Washington* and secretly worrying about something that wasn't in the newspaper at all when the 'phone rang. He reached out from his armchair and took it.

"Hello Oh, hello, Mick. Well, I didn't want to go out tonight. Is it really important? Can't it wait till morning? Well, I don't know—hang on a minute."

He clapped his hand over the mouthpiece and looked across at his wife who was in the opposite chair. She was knitting calmly.

"Pet," he said, "give me six reasons why I can't go out tonight. Quick."

"There aren't any reasons, and it's no good lying to Mick, anyway," she said. "You know he can read anyone like a book. If he says it's important, you can bet it's important."

"Hey, are you my wife or his? Co-operate, darn you!"

"Just tell him plainly you don't want to go."

Bell grunted and addressed the receiver. "If it's all the same to you, Mick, I'd rather not. You see, any moment, now, something might happen . . ."

"Nothing's due to happen for three or four days yet," said his wife, joining up a fresh ball of wool.

"All right, Mick" said Bell, wearily. "You don't have to keep on at me. My wife's on your side, anyway. I'll come right away. 'Bye."

He went and got his hat and coat. He pulled the window curtain aside and took a peek at the black night.

"Raining like crazy," he said. "Bess, you're a double-crossing, heartless she-cat."

He bent and kissed her hard. "And I love you very much," he added.

He paused at the door for a final injunction: "If anything starts, ring me right away."

The moment Stanley Bell stepped out of the yellow cab, it was as though someone had yanked out the bathtub plug up in heaven. The rain had ceased to a drizzle, but now it came down with a woosh. It bounced up off the sidewalk like rubber. Bell had twenty feet to cover between the cab door and the entrance to the apartment building. He ran, but he might as well have lain full length in the gutter—he could have got no wetter.

"Filthy night," he said to the elevator attendant. "Michael Grahame's apartment—the penthouse."

The attendant slammed the gate and made no answer. He'd been on duty a long time and felt tired. He looked at the fast-growing pool at Bell's feet, knew he'd have to mop it up, and felt more tired.

As the elevator mounted, Bell thought about Michael Grahame.

They'd been friends for twenty years, and all of that time Mick had climbed as steadily as this elevator. From scholarships to college, from college to study in the top-drawer clinics of psychiatry in Vienna, from Vienna to Atlantic City and private practice and authorship—then on to New York, some measure of fame and wealth and this penthouse on Upper Fifth Avenue.

Symbolically, Mick was roof garden and Bell was roughly fifth floor, though they'd started together at ground level.

But Mick didn't look at it symbolically. His values never changed. That was why their friendship endured. And Stanley Bell prized that friendship as he prized nothing but his wife's love.

Why did he so regard Mick? As the elevator whirled up, he analyzed the feeling. It was because Mick was reassurance. He represented firmness and sanity in the chaos of dying faiths, toppling values, and the growing greeds and fears of this world. The world

was going crazy because of the thousand frustrations of a thousand desires.

Mick's sanity and strength lay in the fact that he never seemed to want anything, that he was never frightened to give. If you coveted the Delacroix over his mantel he would give it to you as lightly as he would hand you a cigar.

He never asked for anything himself, never envied anyone, and, because he wanted nothing from the world, it became his friend and lavished wealth and honour on him.

Bell's saga had been different. His rise in the publishing world had been in the teeth of opposition. Had the opposition been of his own creation? Had he assumed, in this highly competitive business, that everyone so engaged was his rival—indeed, his enemy? And had he thus made fresh enemies for himself?

Bell realized now that something like that lay at the root of his own indifferent progress. That he was symptomatic of the current world outlook. That he was a fool among approximately two billion other fools. Suddenly he was blazing mad at himself.

He carried his fury out of the elevator with him, past the ebony plate announcing in gilt, MICHAEL GRAHAME: CONSULTING PSYCHIATRIST, and into Grahame's living room. The tenant was reclining in a saddlebag armchair, slippered feet on a foot-stool, gazing lazily up at the smoke rising from his cigar.

"Mick," said Bell furiously, "sometime we're going to have one of our long, cosy talks about life and how it should be lived. And I'll be going for your throat because you, knowing better, have allowed me to act like a fool for so long. But not tonight. I'm not staying a minute longer than I can help. Now why the hell have you dragged me over here on a night like this when you know very well—"

"There's a glass of rum and hot water for you on the sideboard," said Grahame, calmly. "Thought you'd need it."

"Thanks," said Bell and went for it.

"Blast!" he said, "I'm leaving wet footprints all over your Kairwan carpet."

"Hang your clothes in the airing chamber. There are slippers here and a dressing gown warming on the radiator."

"I'm *not* staying. I've got to—"

"Get out of those wet things, of course," took up Grahame. "Or you certainly won't be staying—in this world for long. Bess will have to spare you for half an hour, while your things dry, or she might have to spare you forever."

"Oh, *all* right," said Bell, ungraciously.



As he changed, he said, "What's it all about, anyway?"

Grahame looked at him. Both men were in their fifties. Bell was thin, taut, and anxious-looking. Grahame was large, corpulent, relaxed, and radiated serenity.

"About my last book," said Grahame.

"What about it? It's still selling. I'm reprinting it next month."

"I mean my latest book," said Grahame. "That."

He indicated a Florentine leather folder on the table enclosing a thick wad of typescript. Bell went over to it in his drawers.

"You never told me about this. When did you start it?"

"Fifteen years ago," said Grahame.

Bell raised his eyebrows and the cover of the folder simultaneously. The first page said:

THE WHOLE MAN

Book I: Involuntary Hypnosis: Change of Emphasis

Book II: The Power Complex and its Resolution

Book III: Free Will and Determinism: a Synthesis

Book IV: Full Integration

He flipped the pages over. It was very technical. Up till now

all Grahame's books had been the wide-selling popular sort—*Master That Inferiority!*, *More Abundant Living*, *The Dynamo in Yourself*. And so on.

Bell donned the dressing gown thoughtfully.

"It'll take a lot of paper, printing, and binding," he said slowly. "Trade conditions are still none too easy."

"You think it won't sell."

There was no note of query in Grahame's voice. He said it flatly, as though he knew exactly what was in Bell's mind.

"It won't sell anything like your usual stuff," said Bell. "It'll be expensive to produce, and I'll have plenty left on my hands. I'd do it out of my regard for you, only—well, frankly, Mick, I don't think the firm's finances will stand it. We've been shaky for a long time. Your popular psychology stuff has been our mainstay for years. Every other risk I've taken has fallen flat. I'm a rotten business man."

"Actually," said Grahame, "you're a pretty good businessman. Only you're in the wrong business. Publishing isn't your racket. You've no sense of what the public wants."

"Maybe."

"I'm catching the one a.m. train to Chicago—lecture tour," said Grahame. "I'll be away for a long time. I asked you to come here tonight to hammer a few things into your head. First, *The Whole Man* will be a best-seller. You'll make a pile out of it."

"You've already made your name."

"Purely marginal fame. *The Whole Man* will make world history. It'll have ten times the influence of *Das Kapital*. Second, there's no time to lose about it. I want you to take it back with you tonight and lay it on the line right away. If it's going to shake the world out of its war hypnosis, it'll have to start doing it pretty darn quick before the radioactive clouds start rolling."

Bell gave a short, harsh bark of laughter which expressed the cynicism of the age. To Grahame, keen prober of mental states, it said a lot.

"So you've written mankind off, Stan?" he said, benignly.

"Naturally. It's incurable. We're one of nature's mistakes. We were designed wrong at the start."

"Yet there's a lot worth while in homo saps," said Grahame. "It really would be one of nature's mistakes to scrap him now. I don't think she will."

"Where's your evidence for this optimism?" grunted Bell.

Grahame waved his hand in a circular movement to indicate the

adorned walls of the room. The gesture embraced the originals and reproductions of Delacroix, a Van Eyck, two Corots, Van Gogh's 'Champ d'Oliviers,' and Greuze's 'Milkmaid'.

It included the loaded bookshelves, the cream of the world's poetry, and Tolstoy, Flaubert, Balzac, Dickens, Shaw, Wells. In its orbit came the Ming vase, the Rodin statuette, and the view of the Golden Gate bridge.

"That," he said, "and much, much more. Where's your evidence for your pessimism?"

"That," said Bell, and stabbed a finger at the Sunday newspaper draped over the arm of Grahame's chair.

The headlines and sub-headings shouted: THE COLD WAR RENEWED . BREAKDOWN OF TALKS FURTHER H-BOMB TESTS SCIENTIST SAYS BRITAIN WARNS MOSCOW DENIES PRESIDENT ACCUSES

Grahame picked it up and turned to an inner page. "Here's an item of interest, Stan," he said, and began to read: "Moscow, Saturday. The size—"

"I'm not interested in what Moscow says," interrupted Bell, petulantly. "I'm not interested in what anyone says. It's what they do that matters. Everyone's gabbing about peace and preparing for war. They make me sick."

"They won't face the fact that the causes of war lie neither in economics nor in political history but in psychology," murmured Grahame. "However, for once, this isn't about war. Here, read the thing yourself."

He tossed the paper to Bell. The publisher read it with a frown.

MARTIANS CAME IN 1908

—says Soviet writer

Moscow, Saturday: The size of a hole in the crust of the earth made by a heavenly body on June 30, 1908, has convinced the Soviet writer, A. Kazantsev, that the Martians arrived on Earth that day in a uranium-propelled spaceship.

Whatever hit the earth that day at Tungus, Siberia, left no fragments of itself behind, Kazantsev stated at the Moscow Planetarium today.

He said it could only have been a Martian ship laden with enough uranium to carry it back to the planet.

"Certain it is," he said, "that no meteorite could have done the damage the Tungus missile did, blasting an area greater than all the Moscow region and sending seismic shocks twice around the world.

I believe the Martians left the planet in 1907 and arrived in June, 1908, but their ship exploded."

"So what?" asked Bell.

"Have you never wondered why Mars has never sent us visitors as far as is known? It's an older planet than Earth and therefore presumably with a more advanced civilization, technically and morally. Don't you think they should have sent us explorers, missionaries, ambassadors, or colonists long before this? In fact, long before 1908?"

"I haven't given it a thought. Maybe the Martians haven't, either. Maybe there aren't any Martians."

"Maybe," said Grahame. "But there's definitely carbon dioxide in the atmosphere of Mars, and the new infra-red spectrometer shows that the polar caps are certainly solidified water. The temperatures are extreme by Earthly standards but far from making life impossible—even Earthly life. The vegetation—"

He went on about the flora and topography of Mars and was giving the facts of the canal controversy when Bell interrupted impatiently.

"Look, Mick, some other time I'd be glad to sit at your feet and hear all about it. I mean that. But I'm not going to sit here taking lessons in astronomy when I may be needed at home. You wanted to give me the new book. Right, I'll take it with me and see if I can get it out when I've counted the petty cash. If that's all, I'll be going."

"Wait," said Grahame, and produced his cheque book. He wrote out a cheque and thrust it on Bell. It was for a sum that made Bell blink.

"Finance the book with that," said Grahame. "Get a large edition out quickly. That'll settle your doubts about losing out on it."

"But—"

"You can return it out of the profits when they come in," said Grahame, quickly, anticipating the objection.

"Well—thanks."

"Your clothes will take at least another ten minutes. Perhaps you can spare me time to air a little fancy of mine?"

"Go ahead, Mick. But don't let it run away with you. About Mars, is it? You think we were visited by Martians in 1908?"

"Perhaps we were. Suppose we were. Suppose they had another try and pulled it off. Suppose they landed tomorrow. What kind of a reception do you think they'd get?"

"Depends what kind of a mood they were in and what they looked like," said Bell. "If they were hostile, like Wells's things, and started flashing heat rays around, I guess they'd soon be nothing but another uranium-made hole in the ground. Unless they had bigger

and faster bombs than we. If they were inoffensive but still looked like Wells's things, they'd probably end up in a zoo. If they were halfway human, I supposed they'd be fêted and interviewed on television. But I doubt whether they'd be allowed to settle here."

"That's it, Stan. You reflect the current outlook exactly. You see it in terms of power. Two different races, so one's got to get on top of the other. That's the mental sickness my book analyzes—the power complex."

"That's not new."

"No. Far from new. It goes back to the old tribal fear of the stranger. The intolerance of the *different*. Everyone wants everyone else to accept *his* creed, to be like himself and thus harmless to him. This craving for security, for protection against the different, won't give tolerance and common sense a chance. It's the philosophy of dialectic materialism, and people are acting by it more and more, whether they're Marxists or hate Karl's guts or have simply never heard of him. But all this and much more is in my book."

"Okay, I'll read it religiously and let you know my views," said Bell. "But I don't want to be drawn into a discussion right now."

"All right. I just want to make my point. That is, if the Martians came and stayed for any length of time, there would inevitably arise a state of tension and probably conflict between them and man. Because—and especially if the Martians were a superior race—this increasing fear of the different would pump suspicion into a frenzy in men's minds."

"Surely, if the Martians were more civilized than we, they'd first send missionaries to educate us out of this lowly state," said Bell. "After all, we sent missionaries to Africa and the South Seas to help the natives out."

"And fine juicy steaks the missionaries made until the white man turned up in force, complete with guns, to show said natives who was really top dog! Can you imagine proud, intolerant Man, lord of this planet, content to play second fiddle to a crowd of intruding Martians and permitting himself to be bossed by them? No, Stan. He'd soon turn them into juicy steaks—unless, of course, they also had a power complex and slapped his ears down first."

"I see. You think that's the reason why the Martians have never visited us?"

"No. I think they have visited us."

"You mean they tried to in 1908?"

"Doggone, no," said Grahame, stubbing out his cigar. "That

was a meteorite and nothing else, 'Soviet Science' notwithstanding. I mean long before that."

"Prehistory?"

"No. In recorded history."

"But they're *not* recorded!" exclaimed Bell.

"They are. I believe they landed here unseen, went around observing us unseen, and left missionaries to educate us unseen."

"Why unseen? How unseen?"

"Why? Because they didn't wish to become steaks. How? How do bird and animal watchers observe unseen? They try to make themselves look like part of the landscape. Which is only a substitute for making themselves look like part of the life they're observing. Some of the top deerstalkers actually get themselves up in a deerskin, to look like deer at a distance. Those who first studied the Arabs dressed as Arabs, moved among Arabs and passed for Arabs—even in the sacred enclosure of the Kaaba, where non-Mohammedans were forbidden on pain of death."

"You mean," said Bell, slowly, "you think Martians have been moving among us, disguised in some crazy way as human beings? Observing us—and educating us?"

"Yes," said Grahame. "Who are the teachers of mankind?"

"I—er—" hesitated Bell and veered off anxiously: "You haven't put this nutty idea in the book, have you?"

"No. I said this was a fancy of mine."

"Good!" said Bell, relieved. "Well, I guess you could say the teachers of mankind are the originals, our really great poets, artists, composers, engineers, scientific men, and so forth. The creators of all this."

And he imitated Grahame's circular gesture at the books and *objets d'art* in the room.

"Exactly. They're the missionaries from Mars. They set the standard. And the rest of mankind tries to attain it whenever they can manage to turn their thoughts away from war-making."

"There must have been droves of missionaries coming and going through the ages, then," said Bell, with mild humour.

"Perhaps not so many as you may think. I visualize these people changing their rôles, their bodies, sometimes even their subjects through the years to avoid monotony—and I can imagine them becoming *very* bored sometimes! Being born again—reincarnated. Though perhaps the change-over is gradual. I mean, as the life fades out of one body through senile decay, so it flourishes in the new body in the form of a child."

Bell regarded the speaker doubtfully. "Think my clothes are dry now," he said, and went and got them. He started dressing himself.

"A form of immortality," murmured Grahame lazily, as if musing aloud. "'Intimations of Immortality.' Wordsworth died in 1850. Robert Louis Stevenson was born in 1850."

"What of it?"

"Byron died in 1824. He was the restless kind. Supposing he fancied himself a great physicist for a change? Lord Kelvin was born in 1824. Shelley died in 1822. Pasteur was born in 1822. Titian died in 1576, and Burton, of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, was born that year. In 1809 Haydn, the father of the symphony, died—and Abe Lincoln was born. In 1828 Schubert died, Tolstoy was born."

Bell fought with his twisted suspenders and said nothing.

"One presumes the Martian who played Voltaire from 1694 to 1778, and Sir Humphry Davy from 1778 to 1829, and Rubinstein from 1829 to 1894 must have had some fun," reflected Grahame.

"And where did he go in 1894?" asked Bell, gruffly.

Grahame smiled. "Surely he was due some leave after that? Probably he went back to Mars for it."

"In a leave party, huh?" Bell tried to make it sound like levity, but underneath was uneasiness about the way Grahame was talking. To him, Grahame had always stood for common sense personified. But this fantastic stuff . . . if it were meant as a joke, it wasn't particularly funny.

And if Grahame were even half serious, it made one wonder whether the psychiatrist wouldn't soon need a psychiatrist—and whether *The Whole Man* was really valuable literary property or only something of like quality.

"I doubt whether there were enough of them to make up parties," said Grahame, still smiling. "But there might have been friends who went in pairs. For instance, two composers, like Liszt and Berlioz, who both died 1867. Or two writers, like Mark Twain and Tolstoy, who both died in 1910. And two men who knew as much about the human soul as anyone, Cervantes and Shakespeare, both died on the same day—April the twenty-third, 1616. On the other hand, Wordsworth and Beethoven were born in the same year, 1770."

"I never could remember dates," said Bell, tying his shoelaces.

"I'm not very good at them myself—these are only a few odd ones that occur to me," said Grahame, carelessly. "But there's one series I know well. I'll write it down for you."

"Oh, don't trouble," said Bell, now fully dressed and brushing his coat. But Grahame scribbled a list on the back of an old envelope and held it out to him. Bell took it.

"That—" began Grahame, and was interrupted by the telephone. At the sudden loud tintinnabulation, Bell's stomach seemed to contract to a small lump of pain.

"That may be for me," he said, and licked dry lips.

"It is," said Grahame, who had answered it, holding it out to him. Bell found he was reaching for it with the hand that still clutched the list. He thrust the list impatiently in his pocket and took the handset.

"Hello."

Bess said: "It's started. Sooner than we expected. Don't worry. It'll be some time yet. I'm all packed. The taxi you come back in can take us on to the hospital."

"Right. I'm leaving straight away. Make yourself comfortable, pet. Shan't be long. 'Bye."

He dialled the number of a cab rank. When the cab was ordered, he gulped the neat Scotch the understanding Grahame had placed silently at his elbow.

"Thanks. It would have to happen the one evening I left her alone. I could murder you, Mick! However, I've no time now."

He snatched his hat.

"Take the book," said Grahame, quickly. "Please."

There was a note in his voice which made Bell, for all his haste, pause to look at him. Grahame was on his feet, a massive figure, standing plumb in the centre of his beautiful room. His expression was one of entreaty. Never before had Bell seen Grahame show evidence of wanting anything badly, a favour least of all. Somehow, it moved him.

"Sure, sure," he muttered. "Can't stop to wrap it, though. Can I borrow the folder?"

"You can keep it."

Bell thrust folder and manuscript under his arm. Grahame relaxed. He even smiled.

"Don't worry about Bess," he said. "It'll turn out all right. I'd come with you, but I'm booked for that train."

"That's all right," said Bell, and they shook hands. "Hope the tour's a hit. When you're back, I'll be seeing you."

"Yes," said Grahame, and there passed in his eyes an amused twinkle which Bell was to remember.



The rain had stopped.

As the taxi bore him down the avenue, Bell glanced back through the little rear window at the apartment house. Lighted windows zig-zagged up its tall, dark sides to the penthouse, shaped against the night sky. There was a break in the clouds above it, a handful of dim stars just visible.

It was a glimpse into the infinite that one rarely obtained in New York.

And somehow, suddenly, Grahame's fancy about the missionaries from out there seemed—possible. When you were moving, trembling, toward the eternal mystery of the birth of a new part of your own self—especially if it was your first child and you were the apprehensive sort and you were mad about your wife—then in that borderland of the uncertain and the unprecedented almost anything seemed possible.

He came back to the flat as the shadows were long in the early morning light.

He had a shave and a lonely breakfast. It didn't seem right without Bess at the other side of the little table.

But he was immensely relieved. Things had gone fine. Bess

was recovering. And he was a father—of a son. Pride glowed within him.

On another morning, the mail's reminder of his precarious business situation would have worried him. Now it didn't seem to matter. He even took up the newspaper and glanced over the headlines with a light heart.

Two minutes later he saw an item which knocked all the cheerfulness out of him, which made him push his plate aside and rest his head in his hands.

A quarter of an hour after midnight last night, the paper told him, a cab taking the well-known psychiatrist and author, Michael Grahame, to Grand Central Station, had crashed into a streetcar. Grahame had been killed outright.

And Bell, in his empty flat, felt great gulfs of loneliness opening up all around him. The rock of Grahame had vanished overnight. And Bess was not here to comfort him. Not that he wanted her to know about Grahame yet. She was still weak. And she had liked Grahame.

But she had nothing like his own love and hero-worship for the man. He recalled his brusque impatience with Mick a few hours back and wished he'd been more gracious. The pride of his fatherhood sank slowly in a swirl of grief and self-pity.

At midday he went to see Bess again, bearing orchids he couldn't afford. His son was asleep in the cot at her bedside.

Bess said: "Well, there he is. Half a day old already. It's just twelve hours since he arrived."

Bell glanced at his watch. It was twelve-fifteen.

"That's right," he said. "I ought to know. Shall I ever forget!"

They laughed. But his laughter died before hers because he remembered something: Mick was killed at the same time that their son was born.

Exactly!

Bess sensed his sudden change of mood. "What's the matter, love?"

He didn't answer. He was fumbling in his pocket. He drew out the crumpled old envelope Mick had given him, and, for the first time, read what his friend had written.

Then he got up to stare unseeingly out of the window.

Mick had been fifty-three—born in 1904.

Then, as he gazed at the noontday shimmer, his doubts and un-

certainties fell away from him. He knew a confidence that he had never known before.

The Whole Man would be all Mick said it would be.

It would make Bell's fortune and lift Grahame's name into the ranks of the great. And there was every chance that eventually it would do what it was primarily designed to do—set mankind's feet firmly on the true path of deliverance from its own confusion of heart, mind, and soul.

Best of all—to him, personally—Mick was with him, would always be with him.

Bess looked at him, puzzled, then picked up the envelope. Her perplexity grew as she read:

<i>Michelangelo</i>	—	1474
		1564
<i>Galileo</i>	—	1564
		1642
<i>Newton</i>	—	1642
		1727
<i>Gainsborough</i>	—	1727
		1788
<i>Schopenhauer</i>	—	1788
		1860
<i>Chekhov</i>	—	1860
		1904

"What does it mean, darling?"

He came back to her, took the envelope, folded it carefully into his wallet.

"It's just some notes Mick gave me."

"Oh," she said, "that reminds me. Has it struck you—the boy looks rather like Mick? Don't you think there's something of Mick in him?"

He turned bright eyes on the little red and wrinkled face in the cot.

"Yes," he said, quietly, "I'm sure there's quite a lot of Mick in him."

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE



Murder in Reverse

With time running backwards his objective seemed easy. There were unforeseen factors to be taken into consideration, however.

Illustrated by John J. Greengrass

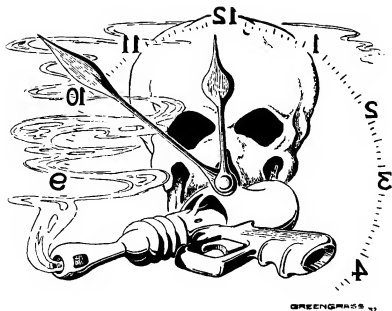
It was exactly as though he had blinked.

Surely no longer time had elapsed? Yet he felt so weak that he might topple over at any moment, and the back of his skull throbbed and his brain was as muzzy as if someone had clubbed him.

Was he back in an Overlord's prison? Hadn't he suffered enough brutality since the Invasion of Earth?

The Invasion of Earth, from Space He was one of the civilian soldiers of Humanity's Resistance Army. His leaders—whom for security reasons he did not know—had made him the spearhead of a counter-attack in the continuing war of nerves. But what was he supposed to do?

He had stepped up on to the platform of the Time Reverser. Its complexity of electronic apparatus had seemed to engulf him. Any kind of life had momentarily seemed very sweet in comparison with being launched into the unknown. But he had steeled himself and begun turning towards Mallins. He had actually glimpsed Mallins on the edge of his vision. The bald, bearded professor—indistinguishable from any other manual worker in this slave age, though he had no doubt been academic enough seven years ago—had been reaching for the master switch.



And it had been exactly as though he, Bramley Cairn, had blinked.

He peered around for Mallins, but his dim eyes saw Peter first.

Peter Anbride stood against the window, which was open. He was shouting something quite incomprehensible and waving his arms most strangely. His words, if words they were, sounded like:

“Marb! Ssee-lup! Marb! Ssee-lup!”

He lifted his arms in a swinging motion as he turned to the window. An old fashioned china washjug came up from outside into them. As he swung it on up over his head, water seemed to come from outside and all around into it—and stay in it. Places on the floor that had been shining wet in the electric light were suddenly miraculously dry. He swung the jug over and down, small splashes flickering into it, on to the washstand. Shards of china leaped from the floor in defiance of gravity to slide beneath it and form themselves into an unbroken washbowl.

Peter swung around, gesturing and shouting;

“Ssee-lup Marb! Marb! Ssee-lup!”

Bram frowned at him. Other sounds drew his attention to the door. Mallins struggled there with furniture. It appeared to have

been piled against the door hurriedly, anyhow—practically everything the room contained, except the washstand with its massive marble top. But Mallins was dismantling it as though their lives depended on the door being free. He reached out and a chair sprang into his work-roughened hands. He took two paces backwards, one sideways and put the chair with uncanny accuracy and speed in its usual place against the wall. One pace sideways, two forward, and another chair leapt into his hands—

Bram stared. Nothing seemed right.

He looked down at the watch on his wrist. Giddiness swamped him, but cleared as he made an effort of will. It had been eighty-three when he had stepped on to that platform. Then he noticed the second hand was moving anti-clockwise. Anti-clockwise?

His watch was reversed. Under the influence of the Time Reverser Field, he was going back through time for one hour, moving against the normal flow of events, reversed to everyone and everything else, to kill a human being who was so closely guarded by police and the machines of the Overlords as to be invulnerable to any ordinary means.

Fear of failure impaled him like a lance of ice. He was in no condition for any action. A bead of sweat trickled up his hot face. He began to raise his hands. An agony of pain that accompanied the action receded as he saw the gun in his hand. His fingers moved on it, drawing encouragement from the cold metal.

He looked up as Peter gave a startled yell:

“Ssee-lup!”

Peter was closing the window. He caught a half-smoked cigarette that leapt into his hand from the ashtray on the washstand. Smoke funnelled into his mouth as he leaned back behind the cover of the tattered curtain. His mouth closed over one end of the cigarette and its other end glowed. He seemed to begin a running commentary on events outside.

Another gabble of sound drew Bram's attention. Mallins—a puny, grimacing, unkempt figure—stood gesticulating up at him.

The professor's speech meant nothing, but his urgency was plain enough.

Bram pulled himself together. He thought that he actually felt a little stronger than he had at first. Did not his heart beat more easily?

He stepped down on to the worn linoleum. His knees buckled under him and he stumbled forward unable to stop until his left hand clutched the edge of the door. He felt some surprise in finding it

open. Leaning on it, he stared down the steep flight of stairs.

At the bottom a policeman was pointing an automatic pistol up at him. But, as he stared, quite helplessly, into the black hole of the muzzle, it was drawn back and down as the policeman holstered it. The man leaped backwards into the little shop. The noise of the door's click after him reached Bram before it appeared to slam.

Bram's breath sighed out and the sinking in of his ribs set his side on fire. He looked down. Drops of blood were rising from the floor and entering a red stain on his worker's overall. A hole where a bullet had entered him looked like a black beetle at the top of the stain.

He bit his lip and turned his head. Mallins and Peter were sitting beside the platform, gaping at him as though he had just entered. But, *of course*, to them as they moved through time in the opposite direction to him, *he had just entered*.

He was beyond their aid; no longer in the world of their experience. He clutched the loose bannister rail at one side, descending painfully, step by step, as silently as he could.

He reached the door, dragged it wide and was in the darkness of the shop. Alone. He closed the door softly after him. They had put up the shutters yesterday evening, he remembered, closing up as had all other businesses in preparation for today's world-wide holiday of C.A.C.—the Celebration of the Anniversary of Conquest Sight, however, was not necessary to stumble around the counter. He even remembered the second-hand TV console they had bought three days back and skirted it successfully.

He listened at the outer door. Footfalls, voices and traffic seemed all quieter than usual. That was because of the workless day. No use wasting time. He was already weak. He stuffed the revolver into his pocket, turned the knob of the Yale lock, reached up and thumbed up the trip of the door buzzer the wrong way so that it would cause no alarm, pulled the door wide suddenly and stepped out.

A screech of misused rubber startled him. Smoke was hovering around the tyres of a big police car reversing with increasing rapidity away from him. Agony ripped at his side. He heard the scream of a bullet. Two reports rapped out. Smoke made two little puffs into the muzzle of a gun sticking out of a side window. He felt a curious sensation of pressure being drawn off him.

And, although his head still ached, he felt fine by comparison. The gun jerked back into the car window, its firer's head with it, and the car rushed backwards, giddily; in and out of the sparse traffic.

People were looking at him from all directions even those

who walked backwards with amazing ease had heads turned towards him, mouths open, eyes wide, as though they thought he was part of some publicity stunt.

He swallowed hard and looked down at his tingling side. Or was it only his imagination that made it tingle? The beetle and stain had gone.

So that was what it was like to be shot in reverse. He grinned as relief flowed through him. He laughed. He was moving backward through time—

He was Fate coming back to do something that had already happened—

He frowned. From the point of view of everyone else on Earth, he had already succeeded, or failed. What *had been* for these people, *would be* for him.

It was still hard to realise the full significance of that. No wonder Mallins had talked endlessly of the time reversal field during the past six months which it had taken them to assemble the Reverser in that upstairs room. No wonder the old professor had forgotten to shave as piece by piece the apparatus slowly came through the mails with a galaxy of world-wide postmarks. No wonder he had looked excited as he'd switched on for the test run that very morning.

"Well, it's finished," Mallins had said. He was speaking to himself, not addressing the others. And he was beginning to breathe rapidly in his excitement.

He stretched out a work-roughened hand. "Switch on test circuit." His panting sawed into the silence, while he studied a meter. "Current building up as planned on the grid."

A pilot light flickered into brilliance. "Reverser ready for operation." He might have been reading from a book of instructions. He adjusted a calibrated dial. "Ten seconds back out of the future . . . that's well within the power of the test circuit."

He stood back, panting hard, eyes glassy with thought, one hand fumbling with his beard while the other hesitated on the master switch.

"An auxilliary mechanism will pull the test doll steadily from its present position in space. Movement to the doll's final resting place will take up the ten seconds for which I have set the Reversing Field. And what we witness will—if our reassembly has been efficient—give us an impression of what one of us will experience."

His breath cut off and the switch clicked.

The platform hazed with blue glare. "One" —that was Mallins counting hoarsely.

Bram felt an instant of anti-climax as he saw the doll had dis-

appeared. Had the apparatus destroyed it? Then his pulse throbbed. For it was at its final resting place!

"Two" said Mallins. The doll, Bram saw, was moving towards its starting place. The professor's hoarse voice ticked off the seconds of its progress "Ten!" The glare faded, doll disappeared—No, it was now at its final resting place!

Mallins panted. "We've done it!" He turned to them triumphantly. "I—I have always found it hard to imagine a man going back in time and shaking hands with himself. Such a postulate always destroyed the reality of most time fantasies for me. Here we have attempted no such feat. What this device does is to reverse the time flow for an object by taking it into the future and sending it back to its starting point. During the time field's operation, the apparatus contracts time into a unity for itself. Those ten seconds of our test have—to the Reverser—become the merest instant; but, if one of us had been in the reverser field instead of that doll, he would have found everything around him going backwards. . ."

Bram licked his lips. At that moment he had had only half understood what such a statement meant. The reality was shocking. He was being forced back against the current of time for one hour. One hour It was not long! he must not waste time.

He launched himself forward. People came hurrying backwards along the pavement, bumping into him. Shaken, he halted. Faces looked over shoulders and there was a scuffling of feet awkwardly avoiding him. People stopped and looked at him as though he were a freak and made unintelligible rude noises at him and shook their fists. He saw a policeman step backwards into a telephone kiosk and gabble into the 'phone, come out and gape at him in bewilderment, *as though just seeing him*.

In front of him, the reversing traffic, though thin because of the holiday, alarmed him, but, with nerves on edge, he jumped in front of a double decker bus, just stopped himself from going under the back wheels of a cab that came swerving back straight at him, and reached the other pavement.

He dived towards the faces of a man and girl walking backwards into the subway station. Avoiding people's backs, he reached the automatic ticket machines. He stopped before one of them, found a shilling piece. The ticket popped out before the coin dropped through the mechanism.

He turned. People were staring at him again. If their actions seemed strange to him, his must seem even odder to them. Perhaps

he could change that. He had used this station a hundred times. Luckily the entrance hall was far from full as he walked backwards, with as much confidence as he could muster, towards the turnstiles.

The ticket collector seemed to glance at his ticket before he showed it, and he was through, being carried along backwards, with the thin stream of people, towards the escalators.

He almost altered direction, then realised that of course the "up" escalator would be the one that was going down for him.

He stepped blindly on it. Sinking backwards unsettled the stomach. Unease filtered up through his determination.

To send back the mass of a man through a whole hour of time took such a drain of power out of the mains that they had had to tunnel out from the basement of the shop to a cable beneath the pavement. Police or Overlords would surely be able to locate such an unauthorised use of current. The power pouring through the apparatus—each part of which had been either stolen or home-made by the Resistance—would almost certainly destroy it. So that one way or another no second attempt would be possible. His was the responsibility.

How slowly the escalator vibrated downwards! Or did it only seem slow because of his racing thoughts?

Perhaps one of the others should have gone, not he. Mallins knew so much more about the Reverser, and might have been less at a loss and so got on with the job more quickly. Peter had been in the Resistance Army for so much longer, for Bram had only been recruited into it after his years of imprisonment. They had all three of them been on that repair job nine months ago in the palace of the Puppet, so that all three knew the back way up to the auditorium in which the traitor would make—or was it had made?—the Anniversary Day broadcast this evening. There seemed nothing to choose between them, now; but, after the test with the doll, when Mallins had said: "Now we must decide which one of us—" he had interrupted

"Me!"

They had stared at him. Peter's anguish contorted his face. Peter was a married man with two children, but it was plain he hated to think the others might be looking on him as any kind of coward. Mallins, on the other hand, smiled then immediately straightened his face. "You don't think I ought to be the one to risk this unknown experience, then?"

"No!" said Bram. "I'm the one."

"Just a minute," protested Mallins. "Let me finish. There's another side to the Reverser, Quite apart from being able to make

itself and one of us independent of normal time for one hour—so that if anyone tries to interfere with it while it's in operation, they would find it inviolate—it has an excellent electronic brain built in to help us.

"You'll have wondered why I've spent so much time with that section of the apparatus, I expect. Well, I've been feeding in all the details of this situation—and every detail of our three lives. The Reverser knows everything possible about us and what we propose to do. We and the situation have all been reduced to statistics—

"It was in just this manner, by the way, that our unit was chosen nine months ago out of a score of other possibles for this task. It judged that we, as a unit, were the best placed and most suitable.

"It still thinks that as a unit we stand a very good chance of success, but it refuses point blank to choose between us. It does no more than recommend one of us as being slightly more suitable than the others. But we all apparently have both qualifications and faults. The final choice is ours."

"Well, you're too old for the job," said Peter. "It's me or Bram. And it ought to be me. It's my gun."

"It's not your gun!" corrected Bram. He remembered the first assassination attempt. He had been a mere bystander amongst the crowd when the Puppet had gone past in the midst of mechanical and human guards. There had been a single sharp report and—confusion. Somewhere out of the sky the gun had dropped right into his hands. At once it had been torn from them; he had glimpsed Peter's boyish face; then Peter had gone, the gun with him; and the police had closed in. Bram's bowels ached as though with the kicks he had received during the long imprisonment that had followed.

"Guns are hard to come by," said Peter. "A good weapon like this is almost unique." He looked dangerous now, more like his usual revolutionary self. "I've had it for six years. Doesn't that give me the right to own it? At any time during that waiting, I might have been arrested and hung for having it. Don't I rate of some importance for that risk alone—with all the checking devices the Overlords have got?"

"It *was* a good job done," soothed Bram. Force only begat force; soft words and arguments might more easily gain his ends. "You must have been very clever."

"You admit my right, then?"

Peter's underlip suddenly trembled. He was obviously realising that he had forgotten his wife, his small son and smaller daughter.

Bram felt a thrill of triumph "Yes," he agreed, "you have a

right. But you ought to agree mine's the better right." To remind Peter of family responsibilities would only get the man's hackles up again. "My right is more personal. I hate the Overlords for what they did to *me* and to . . ." They both knew how, during his imprisonment there had been one period he had shared with a girl in the next cell. They had never seen each other, but they had tapped messages through the wall to bolster each other's courage. Her crime had been as non-existent as his own. But she had suffered even worse horrors at the hands of the devils who'd made a mockery of humanity by allying themselves to the Invaders—"My God!" said Bram. "Isn't that enough? How'd you feel if your wife had been treated like they treated her—and often within your earshot?"

"Well . . ."

"Blast you, man! You must let me .

"All right, then."

"The gun. Give me the gun! "

Bram could feel his lips drawn back, one side twisted down because of a scar and his broken and badly set jaw showing an animal snarl. He was sensitive about his unsightly teeth .

And he became aware of the people on the escalator around him. He closed his mouth. How his head ached! His motives might have been too personal. Perhaps he ought not to have played on the sympathies of Peter and Mallins? He yearned to feel the implacable purpose that he had felt then.

He was so alone and so dizzy and ill.

All these people around him with the hands of their watches all moving in contradiction to his own .

His feet were swept away beneath him. He had forgotten the approaching bottom of the escalator. He crashed on to his back. He struggled madly.

He wriggled sideways. His legs were pinned beneath him. They came free suddenly. He crawled clear and scrambled to his feet. The rush of air of a train coming in turned him towards it.

The train came out of the tube, its brakes sighed, it stopped. People descended backwards from it and went in backwards. Bram started to follow, halted, put a hand to his spinning head: Up and Down platforms were reversed, of course. Other brakes sighed off behind him and he turned and ran through the arch to the other platform, dodged amongst people backing away from the train that was city-bound for him, but not for them, and leapt aboard.

Staggering backwards the few paces to the nearest empty seat, he sank into it.

On the seat opposite, a girl looked away from him in embarrassment. He glanced up, then stared. Her face was marked with wheals.

That wonderful girl who'd been in the adjoining cell must carry just such marks. Although he had never seen her, the memory of shared horror was beautiful to him. Surely, if she still lived, she must have been released by now. The Overlords did not like unproductive humans.

At any other time he would have burst out with the question: "Excuse me, aren't you Betty Clair?" It had become automatic to him. He had done it fifty times before. But now he choked back words that would have been unintelligible to her.

Panic made him close his eyes. Suppose he should miss his one chance of meeting the bravest girl on Earth, because of this twisted course he ran through time? How would her name sound when it was reversed? He felt so confused. How had his own name sounded when Peter had addressed him in the room above the shop?

Peter had kept saying "Marb! Ssee-lup!" What was that turned around to intelligible speech? "Pul-ees! Bram!"—Police! Bram!

He wet his lips. Her's would be something like Railk Eeteb.

He looked up.

She looked mystified.

He pointed to himself: "Nraik Marb."

She shook her head.

He pointed at her: "Eeteb Railk?" It sounded horrible.

She looked away. Perhaps she hadn't understood him. Or did the shake of her head, before his question, seem *to her* to be *after* it?

He hunched down in his seat and rubbed his sweat-drenched hands over his face. How cold and numb it felt!

If his strange illness went on increasing at this rate, he might collapse before he reached the Puppet's Palace— His inadequacy overwhelmed him. Scalding tears filled his eyes. A lump caught in his throat. He panted. No human being could be expected to stand so much.

Yet—

"It's not just a question of assassinating the traitor," Mallins seemed to be whispering in his ear. "As I've said a dozen times, it is our one hope of freeing the human race from slavery—from working for and because of the Overlords until the end of time!

"We don't know much about them—but the little we do know may be enough. We may not know from whence they've come, but can guess the extent of their Star Empire from the many unearthly creatures who serve them. We remember the effortless destruction they wrought when we answered their ultimatum with our own puny weapons. We guess that, long ages ago, they reached a stage in their civilisation that made each one of them like an invincible Caesar. We can only imagine how many other planets like our own have been organised into slavery to make the things they need. We can see that the things we're forced to make for them are only parts of larger things. But if we are not yet brow-beaten enough to be entrusted with final assembly, we can be sure there must be other life forms somewhere to do even that work for them.

"And so, we can be certain that the Overlords are very lazy. It is only logical that they would be. Absolute power must corrupt them, even as it would most of us in similar circumstances.

"They care nothing for us. They despise us as inferior beings so that they do not even pay us the compliment of contacting us life form to life form. Our orders are transmitted down through slaves to the Puppet and he, drunk in turn with his controlled but in its way absolute power over us, carries out those orders with the brutal efficiency expected of him.

"But—suppose we kill this pampered representative of theirs—and do it in a manner they can't understand? Then surely we can expect them to be frightened. How can their science—which they believed to be perfect—fail to be intimidated? Won't they think it far easier to clear out and leave us alone, than to stir themselves and fight back against something that they do not understand but which is of no immediate danger to them?

"I'm sure of it, myself. The ingenuity of the human race—and not its creations in themselves—is still its greatest hope of survival just as history has always shown from the earliest dawn of intelligence!"

Bram found himself sitting bolt upright on the train seat. So much depended upon him. Just as though he had consciously counted the stations at which the train had stopped he knew it was time to get out. As a person he must cease to exist; he was an instrument of mankind. He remembered to back out on to the platform.

He stood for a few moments, looking around the busy station. Standing still in his nondescript overalls he seemed to pass for one of the crowd. To keep up this illusion, he backed all the way to the exit.

A distant roar came to him from the great square away in front of the palace as he emerged into the street behind the rear wall. There were always supporters of any regime. The sun was coming up in the west, dimming the street lighting with the blaze of the day's sunset.

Something screamed towards him, then sang back past his ear: a bullet ricochetting in reverse off the station front behind him—Fear tensed his muscles. How could the guard who had fired that divine his intention? but . . . of course, to them he had already made the assassination attempt, and must appear to be running away.

Suddenly he laughed. He had already had experience of being 'unshot.' Since he was no longer wounded, these bullets could never have hit him in the past to which he was returning.

With grim insight, he knew, too, that neither these men nor the machines of the Overlords could summon help to stop him. Even while alarms were being shouted, he went on moving back through time, leaving the warnings behind him in what was the future to these people—

Time was all in his favour as long as he moved quickly. He ran towards the gates of the Palace yard, zig-zagging instinctively in spite of his conviction no bullet could hurt him.

He followed a car reversing through the gateway. Sentries tried to bayonet him after he leaped between them. He laughed when they shouted after he had passed them.

He was Nemesis!

Police guards at the door yelled their alarm after he had entered. To them he was coming out. In a mad rush he climbed the stairs. Up, up, up.

On a deserted landing, he halted. How quiet was the building! All the things that had seemed to happen to him since he had stepped into the Reverser were still in the future to the Puppet and his creatures. He dragged the gun from his pocket and looked at it. In the light from the sunset beyond a stately window, it shone as though flecked with blood.

He lifted it. Good God! The hammer was set to strike on an exploded cartridge. That would be the one fired at that first attempt, six years ago. He turned the chambers with fumbling fingers. Five bullets for a torturer of women—No, not really that—

Betty would not wish him to kill because of her—in spite of all she had suffered. She was not that sort of person. Somehow he had forgotten what she had really been like, in his desire for vengeance. She would hate him for exacting retribution on her behalf.

He felt his sickness coming back worse than ever. His head



spun. He had forgotten that, as a civilian and before all this, he would never have thought of murder. No, he did not want revenge for himself, either.

To kill a man in cold blood— It was not going to be easy.

He told himself that he was not doing it for Betty, not for himself either; he was executioner appointed by the whole of humanity! And who is there to judge an executioner because he carries out his duty?

He went creeping forward, scarcely aware, through his pain and conflict of emotions, of what he did, until, rounding a corner, he came face to face with two guards.

He sprang instinctively, even as he noticed how uneasy they looked. Their bewildered, frightened warning yells followed him as he thrust open the big doors of the broadcasting hall.

A little man, with slicked down hair, stood on a dais, within a ring of guards, before a batch of microphones, staring at him. Behind the man a packed auditorium seemed full of gaping dummies as Bram lifted his gun.

All he had to do was pull the trigger. But the little man's eyes were so full of pain, his small hands were still pressed to his thin chest

as though having just made a gesture of speaking from the heart.

Something shadowy was swinging something up at Bram's side. It became a man as he turned, and the man had a clubbed automatic in his hand.

Desperately, Bram squeezed the trigger.

Click.

That was all. He knew failure—intolerable guilt because he was letting down a whole enslaved world. The gun would not fire. Perhaps the cartridges were too old, or—

Concussion exploded through his brain. The automatic gleamed blue on its way up above his head as though it had struck him.

His sickness vanished. He felt fine. With sudden clarity, he recalled to mind what had happened before—it might be nearly the full hour before by now—when he had been unshot—yes, *unshot* was the word—in front of the radio shop. So this blow on the head was the cause of all the other suffering he had experienced.

Indecision quite gone, he took aim and squeezed the trigger.

Click.

But surely one of the cartridges must fire? Click, click, click—

Crack!

The gun jolted in his hand—jolted *forward* with flame jumping back into its muzzle.

The little man's eyes widened, his blank face contorted and he staggered a pace *forward*, still clutching his chest.

A gasp of alarm sighed through the auditorium while Bram stood, bewildered. At least something had happened.

But—the little man was turning to his audience, and they were turning to him. Bram's flesh crept in horror and the gabble of the Puppet's reversed voice mocked him as he turned, and fled.

Then two strange but familiar words stood out from the blurr of sound:

"Railk Eeteb—"

They reversed themselves in Bram's mind into "Betty Clair." Berserk fury seized hold of him. The Puppet could only be announcing hostages to be executed as an answer to the Resistance. The monster should be torn apart by Bram's own hands. He sprang around to race back, but—

It seemed he blinked.

He stood, head aching dully, wondering what had happened to him now, unable to see through eyes smarting with smoke.

A choking voice gasped at him: "Where the devil did you spring from?" Fumes of smouldering rubber caught in his throat.

"Well, wherever it was—" the voice's bark penetrated his dizziness. "We're getting you out after your confederates."

Another voice said: "He's got a gun!" The weapon was wrenched from his hand.

The first voice ordered: "Get moving, dog!" His arms were twisted up behind his back and, half sick with agony, he found himself being thrust down the stairs with his shoulders nearly jumping out of joint.

On the pavement outside, police seemed everywhere and they moved normally in relation to him. His advantage had gone—even if he had had the strength to make use of it. "Stand still, you swine!" warned the man at his back, evidently thinking he was about to struggle when he was only swaying with weakness.

A car was coming towards them, through a fringe of wide-eyed spectators, as though it had just been turned around. Its forward motion struck Bram as strange.

"What in hell had they got back there?" one policeman asked the other in a kind of breathless awe.

"Hell only knows," came the answer. "It's gone up in smoke anyway. There'll be the devil to pay over this: The Overlords—"

He broke off to thrust Bram into the car.

The great square before the Palace was empty, cordoned off by soldiers with fixed bayonets. The car paused only for a moment at the gates. Obviously it was expected. It came to a jolting halt beneath the high balcony on which the Puppet made his brief public appearances.

Police and soldiers watched irresolutely as the escort half-carried Bram up through the vast, luxurious building.

The broadcasting auditorium gaped to receive them—a theatre after the show is over. They hurried between the banks of empty seats.

Six men stood on the dais. Two civilians, Bram recognised as having been forced members of the puppet government because they had been trained to rule in the old free parliament; two soldiers, he barely glanced at; Mallins and Peter welcomed him with looks and lifted arms.

Mallins said to the civilians: "This is the third member of our Resistance Army Unit. He did it."

Bram looked down at the little body between the feet of the men and the spindly shanks of the microphones. The Puppet was dreadful to look at. It seemed his chest had exploded *outwards*—

"Now do you believe us?" asked Mallins.

The men turned incredulously towards him.

Mallins frowned. "Where's the gun?"

"Here, sir." The policeman stepped from behind Bram and held it out.

Mallins took it and passed it to the civilians. "Six years ago, a bullet from this weapon lodged so close to the Puppet's heart that no surgeon dare risk removing it."

"But this gun has not been fired," said one of the men, looking up.

Bram suddenly laughed. "Yes. Yes, it has. One bullet has been fired twice. Once into the Puppet and once out of him." He understood now.

They could have understood before if only they had known the right question to ask the electronic brain of the Reverser. That was the trouble with such mechanisms. You could only get exact answers if you formulated direct and unambiguous questions.

Their unit had been chosen because Peter's was the only gun which could kill the Puppet in reversed time. When he, Bramley Cairn, had *un-shot* the Puppet, there had been no gaping wound to close—and so a new wound, more dreadful than the first, had been torn by the reversed bullet, this time killing the traitor.

Peter was smiling. "So that's why we were chosen for the job!" His eyes shone with pride because it was his weapon that had saved the world—and with hope, too, so that Bram could imagine him thinking of his wife and two growing children.

The two civilians looked upwards, and then at each other. "The Overlords certainly seem to have gone—and taken all their machines with them," said one. And the other gulped. "It's hard to believe after all this time." He stared around the silent auditorium as though expecting any moment to see the machines coming back for the domination of Earth to begin all over again. "But—suppose they decide to destroy us and our planet entirely? They could, couldn't they?"

"What's the use of anticipating that?" asked Mallins. His shoulders were drooping and he was beginning to look very old now that he had done his part. "In my view, it would be more trouble to them than they'd think we were worth."

The two politicians stared at him.

Bram could have yelled at them. . . . would have done so if he had had the strength left for it. Why couldn't they make up their minds, so that he could begin looking for his own future?

Morality

*The sector of these beautiful people was more
horrible than all the loneliness between the stars*

Illustrated by Harry Turner

Carnac was old—dried, and etched with years. The short, grey hair of his head, and his week-old beard were the same length, but the hairs of his stubble were sparse, and pushed their white-tipped heads singly from his space-burnt, papery skin.

“Don’t go out, Father,” whined his daughter. “Don’t leave me by myself. It’s dangerous to be planetbound. Let’s go back into Space.”

He looked at her with distaste. She was thin, and pasty-white. Even in deep space she refused to venture beyond the protective walls of the ship. Her body was not burnt by the cosmic rays that penetrated the thin insulation of the suits. His distaste turned on himself. He was to blame—she had come with him to look after him in his wanderings. She had seen so few human beings that, like a wild animal, she feared them. In his boyhood he had seen wild animals, caught by hunters and brought from some new untamed planet to Earth. Different as they were, all shapes, with mind-defying

twisting legs, and strange feathery feelers; with nameless-coloured skins, and noiseless voices, they had had one thing in common—fear.

"You're like a wild animal," he said, but he knew she would not understand—she had never seen a wild animal.

"Why don't we go back into Space?" she said.

A feeling of the uselessness of speech welled up in Carnac. He could not explain why he wanted to walk on soft turf, feel the sun's rays on him, and see tall buildings. Frustration turned to anger. "Because *I* want to stay here," he said.

"Don't go. I'm frightened," she said. Her lips quivered; soon, he knew, she would cry.

"I'll lock the ship behind me. Nothing can harm you then," he said, more kindly than before.

The airlock closed with a small noise from the outside. Inside, Carnac knew, the great clang would go echoing round the steel walls of the ship to join the sobs of his daughter in a symphony of misery—but he was outside in the sunshine and openness. He sucked the crisp air into his lungs, expanding them fully at each breath. It was morning. Mist still lay, like a gauzy ruff, at the base of the distant hills, but the city was clear cut, and colourful in the bright light. People were moving in the streets. Cars sped along the great white highways that radiated from the city, almost as though it were a sun and the roads rays.

Thoughtlessly the old man jumped to the ground, and his right knee buckled, as it had done always since that brush with the Arcturans. His time-laden arms failed to obey his brain quickly enough, and he fell full length. The turf beneath his face was soft and cool. He could smell the rich, black soil, and see the clouded beads of dew on the grass stems. Suddenly he wanted to cry; for the beauty of the morning; for his lost youth; and for the long years he had spent in the steel bubble floating in darkness. Tears do not come easily to ducts unused for decades. His eyes were hot and swimmy, but he did not cry, instead he rose, slowly, and re-arranged his toga. Something of the wonder of the morning had gone—he felt a sense of loss—nagging, inexpressible loss.

The promenades of the city were under Carnac's feet. Fountains playing perfumed water, and tall trees were arranged haphazardly on the wide avenues. Beds of flowers made heartbreakingly beautiful patches of colour on the mellow, grey-gold stone of the city. The citizens were brightly dressed and handsome—high-breasted, beautiful

women, and muscular young men—like exotic butterflies amid the beauty of the city.

No unpleasant sensation reached the old man. He forgot his rheumy body in the pleasure evoked by his surroundings. For a while he was unnoticed. He sat on the wall of a fountain and watched the play of the water. The wind fluttering a tree's leaves to sibilance was a pleasure to him. The warmth of the sun on his old skin melted the tensions in his tired mind. For a while he thought nothing—but sat, quiet, in the sun, appreciating the scene with senses sharpened by months spent in a steel prison with only darkness outside.

Something was wrong. The pleasure he felt in the beauty about him faded. He pushed the thought away. It was nonsense conscience, that was it. His Daughter, he had left her in the ship—not that she'd wanted to come with him conscience, that was all. Something *was* wrong. Against his will the thought gained strength, and with it came fear.

A woman, young, with the promise of aphroditic form beneath her robe, had stopped near him. Her face was twisted in an expression that, momentarily, he could not identify—not fear, hardly hate. What then? She turned and walked quickly away. As she moved he knew—*she had been looking at him with disgust!*

Why? He had not shaved, his toga was worn and grubby, but these defects did not merit the almost frightening look on the woman's face. He wondered if he had offended some local tradition—but his clothes were like those of the inhabitants, and he had seen others resting on the fountain walls. Maybe they were telepathic—he had wanted the woman. When he first saw her the fire in his loins, which he had thought dead, rekindled. It was a long time since he had wanted a woman. If she had caught his thoughts that might account for her expression.

Now there was a man, in a bright red robe, who was looking at him strangely. As Carnac swung towards him the starrer turned and hurried away.

A young man, and a young woman then it was as if his mind choked on the thought, there was a moment of chaotic emotion, before he knew the reason for his unease. *There were no old people in the city!* Everyone was young and beautiful. He had heard of 'eugenic' civilisations, where the old and malformed are destroyed. Could this be one such?

The fear that had been tottering on the edge of his conscious-

ness fell on his mind. Sweat came on his face. Several men in uniform green robes were approaching. Straight towards him they came, cutting, with ominous purposefulness, through the patchwork of the crowds. Carnac wanted to run, but the batteries of his body seemed flat. His limbs were too heavy to move. As the green-clad men came closer he sat, trembling, on the fountain wall.

They were round him—a wall of green moving cloth, and handsome blond heads. Without speaking one of them grasped him by the shoulder. The touch brought life to his ancient limbs. He was strong still, and he had fought all over the Galaxy. He knew the dirty tricks of a dozen planets. There was sweat, confusion, green cloth, the feel of flesh bruising under his knuckles, and then the triumph of victory. They were weaklings—like babies, or senile dodderers—their hands had no strength, and their blows hardly hurt him. Two were groaning on the ground, and the others backed away from his fury. Where he had hit one a strange, flesh-like substance was hanging from the green-robe's face, and Carnac's fist was coated with pink goo.

More green-robes were coming. Carnac could see them in the variegated crowd. Run . . . he must run. His breath was tearing his lungs, and the grey-gold paving stones swam past under his feet. The people did not try to stop him. Instead a path opened for his grey, panting figure, and many turned their heads in disgust, as he ran.

Carnac had slept in the sun. Fight and flight had exhausted him, and although he felt unprotected in the sparse cover afforded by the small decorative forest just beyond the city, he had fallen asleep. Now the aftermath was on him. His limbs were weak, and trembled. His fear, however, was shot through with streaks of other emotions—curiosity and desire. The woman who had looked at him with such distaste had roused him. He wanted the climax and surcease of love with a greater urgency than he had known for many years. At present he dared not return to the ship, which lay on the other side of the city. When night came he would go to the ship, but first he would find the woman . . . a woman.

The city was not illuminated during darkness, but the three visible moons gave a fairly strong light. The trees that dotted the streets stood rooted in their own multiple shadows. There were still some people about, but in the pale moonlight Carnac was confident that he would not be recognised. The fountains were stilled. As though they were jeweller's displays the mirrorlike pools reflected the

diamonds-and-black-velvet of the sky. There was no wind, and the trees were silent.

Carnac waited in the anonymity of a tree's shadow. Several groups of promenaders passed at intervals. As the hour grew later the walkers became fewer. Outwardly Carnac was calm. His hands were steady. He felt fresh and vigorous after his sleep. Inwardly he was fighting himself. Fear, desire, and formless notions of morality wrestled in his mind. At one moment he was on the point of hurrying back to the ship, at another he felt that he must stay to satisfy himself.

A woman, alone, was coming across the wide, shadow-splotched street. She moved so that she must pass within a few feet of the dark trunk behind which Carnac hid. Deep shadows on her light robe showed the shape of her breasts beneath. As she passed him Carnac leapt. His arms were round her. He could feel the warmth of her body. Clamping one hand over her mouth he pinioned her arms with the other. The struggle he expected did not come—after the initial reflex motion she was still. With a quick twist he threw her to the ground. He was panting—but not with the exertions of the attack. She lay under him, conscious, but unresisting. He kissed her, hard, brutally.

Something was wrong. He had the same feeling that had come to him in the morning. As he touched the flesh of her face it seemed strangely smooth—too smooth—and although warm, somehow dead. Her hands were caressing his face now, and her lips had fallen apart. As she lifted her arm the sleeve of her robe fell back and he saw, with incredulous horror, a thin, scrawny forearm—an arm in which the movements of the radius and ulna were clearly visible—an ancient, withered arm; the arm of an old, old woman. The face of the green-robe . he remembered it now, something had come away and hung in strips. With a kind of unwilling loathing he tore at the woman's face, and his hands were full of a rubbery skin that peeled away and left a white, wrinkled, collapsed face behind it.

She screamed, weakly, in a cracked and high-pitched voice.

Horror filled him. He ran. The pavements under his pounding feet seemed unclean. He understood now—here it was wicked and disgusting to *look* old.

The stars above beckoned him. They were clean and sterile. Presently the ship—silver head of a fiery spear—rose into the night, and the pasty-faced girl in the steel bubble was happy again.





Harry Turner 57

The Thoughtless Island

Illustrated by Harry Turner

Solo flights across the Pacific—even in this age of jets—are not lightly undertaken. Richard Glenn, staring with inflamed eyes at the cruel mountains of sea sliding by below, had no regrets that he'd started this mad venture, only a strong feeling of annoyance that it was going to finish as disastrously as this.

His light plane shuddered at a fresh onslaught as the storm that had raced in with tropical swiftness battered him down towards the sea. Outside his cabin was chaos. The unnatural darkness all around accentuated the lighted area of cabin and plane. Glenn's strong, stubborn face tightened in anticipation.

Any minute now and he'd be in the drink. So much for his world-girdling flight. It was ironical, really—and then he stopped thinking futile thoughts and concentrated on a lost art. He began flying by the seat of his pants.

Through the sheets of upflung water below, fragmentarily appearing like ghostly beckoning arms out of the enshrouding murk, he had seen breakers.

Breakers meant land. And, suddenly, Glenn was filled with a shocking, ravening desire to live.

The little plane tilted, hung on a wing. The engine whined in protest as Glenn slammed the throttle full open, hauled back on the stick and treadled the rudder pedals. Reluctantly, as though carrying a ten ton bomb, the ship came up. Her nose lifted to give the prop air to thrash. She staggered half over the ring of breakers below. She dipped. The storm howled down. Glenn flung the stick over, dropped her nose fractionally to pick up enough flying speed—if he stalled her over those fanged coral knives down there he'd be pounded to pieces.

The plane answered. Gallantly, propellor a thing of life and silver beauty, she thundered over the reef, shuddering as rain and wind slammed at her slim lines. Glenn peered down.

Everything was a crazy rushing blur. He caught a distorted glimpse of palm trees, bending almost flat in the wind, and curling tongues of frothing water hurling themselves up a silvery beach. Then he was over the trees. For a horrible moment he wondered if he'd overshoot the island.

That fear proved groundless in a greater. Rearing before him he caught a hazy glimpse of a mountain flank. He banked frantically, pulling the plane away from disaster, heading now momentarily straight into the wind.

He could feel the stupendous power of the storm hurling all its thousands of miles of unhindered passage full on this puny man-made object that dared to try to remain in the air. The plane faltered. Finally, without hope of doing anything else, she slid into the groaning trees below.

Glenn tried to relax for the crash: but instead felt his body tense and his muscles tauten. He saw the port wing rip off under the impact, trees speared upwards like stakes at the bottom of an animal pit; the plane flew to pieces. Blackness, complete and utter, fell on Glenn.

When he woke up he was lying on a foam-rubber mattress and a platinum-blond who should have been on the technicolor screen was looking compassionately at him.

To his everlasting credit Glenn managed to think of something else to say.

"So I did go for a Burton, after all!"

The girl said: "I beg your pardon?"

She had nice white teeth, and red lips, and used makeup. Not

quite the usual conception of the angel type. Glenn put an arm under him and shoved himself up. Nothing pained beyond bearing: his head ached and his mouth was dry.

"You mean I'm not in Heaven?" he said.

"Of course not!" She dimpled. "From what I can make out of you I would imagine you'd go the other way."

"Thanks," Glenn said. "Sharp. Didn't take you long to find out all about me."

"I'm sorry—" Her eyes grew large and round. "I didn't mean—"

"That's okay." Glenn put his feet to the floor, and took in his surroundings. He was in a white-washed room, with cool woven-mats as door and window coverings. Sunlight lay golden stripes across the floor and there were some exotic blooms in a funny little pot-bellied vase on a low table by the bed. He looked up, not smiling.

"Well—what's the score? Where am I? Who are you?"

"I'm Thelma Lansdowne. You're on Thornton Island where I'm working at present. This whole island—"

"Working? What doing, in this forgotten place? And Thornton Island sounds as much like a Pacific name as Poughkeepsie would."

"Thornton Island is the name we use. If you'd let me finish I could have told you that the Thornton Drug Company have leased it for their experiments."

From outside the room the coughing roar of some wild beast broke in with the shattering violence of a backfire in a cathedral. Thelma didn't stir a single platinum hair: but Glenn jumped and was visibly startled.

"That sounded like a lion—" he began. And then trailed off. You don't find lions on Pacific islands.

"We have a number of animals in connection with our work," Thelma said calmly. She took out a gold cigarette case, offered it to Glenn. He shook his head and, rising, went past the girl to the window. He pushed the mat aside.

Palm trees sweeping down to a silver beach. A headland curving to enclose a blue, mirror-smooth bay. The line of the reef, with the incessant boom and thunder of the waves. Sunshine. The raucous screech of animals from behind the house. He shook his head, and went back to the bed.

The mat covering the door quivered and parted. A man entered. He was wearing a loose shirt outside his trousers. The shirt was the sort that lets you know it was bought on Fifth Avenue especially for

Miami. Glenn blinked. The newcomer's big face, partially hidden by owlsh horn-rimmed spectacles, looked competent and clean cut. He grinned and stuck out a hand.

"I'm Jim Mellhuish—resident engineer. Had a look at your ship. Guess you won't fly that crate again."

"Thanks—that is—" Glenn stopped. There really wasn't anything to say. 'The news, although expected, had depressed him. He was about to pass some bright, engaging remark that would brand him as a stout fella, when a series of sharp, nerve-jangling blasts on a steam whistle drowned everything, thinking included. Glenn's head ached worse.

Mellhuish shouted something over his shoulder and ran from the room. Thelma, looking white and apprehensive, followed. They had obviously completely forgotten their guest. Glenn decided he might as well join in the fun and ducked out into the sunshine. It lay hot and treacly on his head and shoulders. Thelma and the engineer had disappeared.

The steam whistle stopped shrilling. Behind the house, which was single storied and contained one other window and door beside those of the room he had been in, Glenn could see other houses, tents and iron-barred animal cages. A nasty thought struck him.

Suppose one of the wild beasts had escaped?

It was the most logical assumption. He felt alone, exposed. Whatever the Thornton people were doing on this island, one thing was for sure. It was dangerous. Otherwise they could have done it at home, instead of putting up a plant thousands of miles from anywhere. Glenn began to walk slowly towards the main cluster of houses.

Halfway up the track he heard two dull, plopping explosions. By the time he had reached the first of the cages white coated men were moving about and presently a group shuffled towards him. In the midst was a stretcher and on the stretcher, limp and somehow pathetic, lay an ape. At least, Glenn thought it was an ape; it could have been any sort of largish monkey for all his knowledge of them.

A sickly, sweet odour clung, dissipating. Glenn guessed the monk had been gassed. He listened as the orderlies bore the insensible body past.

"Smart as all get-out! "

"Grabbed the key and used it—"

"I don't believe it! That cage has a combination lock—you just can't twist the key."

"Adolf got out, didn't he? "

"You were careless—"

The beginnings of a fight drifted away and Glenn grinned. He knew monkeys were pretty clever animals; but he couldn't see one going through the complicated motions and memory demands required to open a combination lock. He turned as footsteps sounded.

"Trouble's all over," Thelma said. She looked radiant.

Glenn smiled easily. "Big fuss over little chimp?"

A new voice broke in. "That's no chimpanzee, young man. That is Adolf, a rather particular gibbon, as you could see at a glance by the exceptionally long arms, slender hands and generally lighter bulk than an orang or chimpanzee."

Glenn turned, expecting a heavily moustached, possibly bearded, pince-nezed music-hall professor type. He was disappointed. The man talking with such authority, his voice clearly carrying tones of habitual command, was trim and brisk in dark business suit, rimless glasses, a crew-cut and the fresh-scrubbed face of the energetic business tycoon.

He looked at Glenn, obviously weighing the aviator in some mental balance. A calculating expression flitted across the man's face. Then, his voice hearty, he said: "But then, I don't suppose Primates are your study, Mr. Glenn? I thought not. I was sorry to hear of your forced landing on this island; believe me, we are not so cut off here that we do not hear world news. Your round-the-world attempt appears to have suffered an irremediable setback."

Glenn realised that these people knew who he was, which was less surprising than if they hadn't, and he caught a stronger than imaginary whiff of mystery—but whether that mystery was strictly run-of-the-mill economical stuff, or whether there was more to be found out, he didn't know. The group walked slowly up the path, heading towards a long low building with flanking verandah that Glenn took to be the living quarters and restaurant.

The tycoon—who turned out to be J. C. V. Thornton, either III or IV, Glenn wasn't quite sure which, was gaily talking about such things as "the brachiating proclivities of Adolf rendered his recapture a thing of beauty." Glenn gave up and thought about food.

After the meal, over coffee and cigarettes, Glenn picked up another clue to the possible mystery surrounding this tropical paradise. He had been wondering if he was building up a myth; from a feeling, an odd word, an inability of apparently honest eyes to meet his own, a gibbon's escape, he was creating a conspiracy. And then Thornton, relaxed and at ease with his world, said the words that sent Glenn's mind humming.

"But of course, Mr. Glenn, logic is a vastly over-rated possession. Why, people have logicked the human race out of a good few thousand years of progress."

"How do you mean? Constructive thought gave us all the good things of life today—"

"And the bad? "

"Well, that rests with the individual, really."

Thornton smiled and sipped his coffee.

"An old excuse. The power to add one and one and make two is the root cause of all our present problems."

There was not the shocked silence round the table that Glenn expected after such a resounding bombshell of a prang. The others were drinking coffee, smoking, listening politely. A fat, perspiring man, with the soft white hands of a desk worker, even nodded approval. Glenn cleared his throat. Maybe it was just boot-licking.

"I've always understood," he said carefully. "That the power of man's brain, the size and development of that organ, is what sets him above the beasts. The power to think, to rationalise, to work from a premise to a conclusion, is the factor that enabled us to climb from the cold caves of the fourth Interglacial to the present atomic age."

"A student of pre-history, I see," Thornton remarked affably. The statement was an insult; but Glenn passed it up.

Mellhuish leaned forward. "That sort of thinking, that self-satisfied thinking, has cost the human race a lot of years in its development, Mr. Glenn."

Glenn looked about, at the serious, intent faces round the table. He laughed, a small, nervous laugh that faded into a fragile silence. He felt uncomfortably warm.

"I can't imagine you to be serious, gentlemen," he said at length, hesitatingly. "This is a leg-pull—"

His voice trailed away. Thelma was shaking her glorious head, kindly and compassionately; but very, very firmly.

"You are giving us a perfect example now," she said. "You are arguing—putting forward certain claims by reason of logic. And your logic is completely false—rather," she amended quickly at Thornton's sudden movement of disapproval. "Rather, logic itself is the villain of the piece. The use of the brain for conscious evaluation and decision on problems and courses of conduct is harmful to the whole human race."

Glenn sat under this dumbfounded. Then he pushed his chair back and stood up. "What you are saying is nonsense," he said

roughly. His chair fell over. "You mean to say that we should stop using our brains to think with and gaze into a crystal ball? Or that the disembowelled guts of a chicken will tell us what the mass-ratio of exhaust must be for the next lot of artificial satellites? The trouble with the world is that people don't use their brains enough. Instead of moronically looking at the telly and filling in football coupons and performing some stupid job that they'll disrupt economic progress so as to continue to do inefficiently instead of trying to work with automation, instead of all that if they used their brains a little more we might turn the world into the paradise it can and should and, yes, and will be."

Glenn surprised himself with his own vehemence.

The answer was no less surprising. Thornton rose, took off his glasses, and said mildly: "Bring Adolf."

Fumbling his chair up and sitting down, Glenn felt vaguely foolish. These people were so calm, so ordinary, so utterly non-fanatics. Mellhuish went round the table to Thornton, bent and spoke swiftly into the older man's ear. Thornton shook his head. Mellhuish glanced swiftly at Glenn, shrugged, and returned to his place. Somehow, Glenn got the idea that Mellhuish had been trying to dissuade Thornton.

Then, Adolf, perky and lively at the end of a chain, was brought in by his attendants. The effect of the gas had worn off. His long arms and narrow hands looked, now he was on the ground instead of hurtling through the trees, pathetically awkward.

"Notice his hands," Thornton said. "I am assuming you do not have a great knowledge of the Primates, or of the apes—well, I shan't go into all that now: but you must know that chimpanzees are the most intelligent of the apes and the orang-outangs most like us. Well, neither of them could do what Adolf, a gibbon, did today. He undid a combination lock and escaped from his cage."

"If you mean the sort of combination lock I mean," Glenn said slowly: "Then I don't see how he could have."

"Of course you don't, Mr. Glenn. That's what comes of using your brain. You can't 'figure it out'. You don't 'have sufficient data'. But Adolf here, he knows. He didn't have to figure anything out, he just *knew*."

Jim Mellhuish shoved his chair back and said, loudly:

"I think Adolf has done very well today, Mr. Thornton, but you know how tired he is. He ought to get some rest."

"Of course," Thornton snapped. "Take him away."

The attendants went out, the gibbon ambling happily and almost

gaily at the end of his chain. Glenn stared at Thelma. The girl was white-faced, trembling. He shot a quick look at Thornton. The man appeared *sauve* and inscrutable."

Something was rotten in the state of Thornton Island, and Glenn had a hollow feeling that he was the fellow who had been fingered to uncover the mystery. He didn't like that. He wanted to fly around the world in a single-engine light plane.

By tacit consent, everyone was rising and moving away. Thornton left the wide mess room. Mellhuish, after a quick exchange of whispered conversation with Thelma, rapidly followed. Presently, Glenn considered it convenient to walk up to the girl and ask her if she'd stroll with him in the sunshine. She smiled, a flashingly radiant, but somehow empty, smile, and agreed.

Walking towards the beach, Glenn tried to sort out what he wanted to ask this girl. Her feminine appeal bothered him, made it difficult to consider her as a source of information. Eventually, he said :

"Miss Lansdowne, I'd rather like to push on from here, I assume there is communication outside. When am I likely to get a ship?"

She frowned. "Well, the only boats that call here are company boats, and none is due for some time. I don't know whether Mr. Thornton would radio for one for you; please forgive me, but you understand that we are working on something extremely important here."

"Oh, sure," Glenn said, casually. "But I'd like to get away. This work, I suppose it has something to do with our friend Adolf's tricks?"

"Yes—he is quite a success."

"What was all that stuff you were giving me at lunch? Is Adolf being drugged into a superman?" He laughed.

"I can't answer that, Mr. Glenn. I wish you hadn't landed here. If you'll excuse me, I have work—" She walked away. Presently, Glenn saw her begin to run.

He walked on alone, wondering. Perhaps it was the heat, or being isolated like this that made these people a little scatty. Although Mellhuish had seemed friendly. All except his shirt—that was distinctly inimical to life.

Later on, after supper, Glenn walked again by the beach and listened to a gramophone in the men's quarters. The moon was like a round Danish cheese in the sky, and the stars looked as though they had been specially polished for the occasion. The sea made a soft swishing on the sand. It was very calm and serene.

"Mr. Glenn?"

Glenn swung, his heel grinding into sand, startled. A white figure materialised from the gloom under the palms. He smiled, not liking his first panic.

"Hullo, Miss Lansdowne. What brings you here?"

"Mr. Thornton doesn't like you wandering about on the beach alone. He asked me to tell you, to soften the request, he wants you to feel a welcome guest."

"That's nice of him. Tell me, Miss Lansdowne, where do you come from?"

"San Francisco. Why?"

"I was trying to imagine you in Bournemouth. You didn't quite fit. What's biting Thornton?"

Thelma twisted both hands together behind her back. She turned to look out across the ocean, her face high-lighted by the moon. Then, speaking just above a whisper, she said: "I know this sounds foolish, Mr. Glenn. But I advise you to get away from here as soon as you can. I know you can't just walk away, or swim, even. But bring as much pressure to bear on Mr. Thornton as you can. I don't like what I feel in the wind. I think you will be in great danger if you stay here very long. Please don't ask me why. I am not at liberty to explain what I mean—but I am deadly serious!" Her hands unclasped and she put one finger against his wrist. "Remember—keep your eyes open, and get away soon!"

With that, she ran fleetly across the sand and vanished under the palms. Glenn could still feel where her finger had touched his wrist. It burned like acid.

Another movement attracted his eyes. Before he could do a thing, a man shifted from a clump of palm trunks, walked swiftly away. He wasn't sure; but it looked very much like the fat, moist man with the sweat troubles. Glenn's mouth closed into that straight firm line that meant trouble—for other people.

"It's all very well to tell me to clear out," he said to himself. "But from an island in the Pacific, without a ship or a plane, that isn't easy." Somehow, he didn't see himself building a raft and emulating a Kon Tiki adventure. That was different from flying a light plane alone round the world.

He felt a little uneasy about sleeping; but decided that if he was in any danger trying to stay awake would only prolong the agony. And he needed sleep. He still felt bruised from the crack-up; but the biggest load he was carrying came from some mental reaction. Although he was used to hardship and danger, and, come to that, not unfamiliar with the proceedings of a crashing aeroplane, after such an

experience as that of the night before, the storm and the crash, anyone would be entitled to feel washed out. He went to the room assigned him, turned in and slept as though he were in London.

At breakfast, Mellhuish smiled and offered to show him the laboratory. Glenn jumped at the chance. Thelma was nowhere in sight. She hadn't come in for breakfast and at Glenn's enquiry, Mellhuish said that the girl was on special assignment for Thornton. Glenn didn't like the smell of that, but decided that in his position he could make no move to find out—after all, she might be on a special job. He didn't know enough. He hadn't, as Thornton had so contemptuously phrased it, "enough data."

"Here's where we process the animals," Mellhuish said, throwing open a door. The shed was long and airy, and many animals in cages jumped and chattered along the walls. "We have to be careful of hygiene, and diet and everything—these animals are expensive. Through there is the central lab. where most of the serum is finalised."

Glenn kept a straight face. "What serum?" he asked bluntly. "And, whilst we're on the subject—is this project here a secret? No-one's so far told me what you do here. Apart from turning harmless monks into supermen."

Jim Mellhuish smiled a little sickly. "I guess I shouldn't have mentioned the serum," he said at last. "This whole set-up is secret: but Mr. Thornton told me you would be staying over here. He didn't say that you weren't to be shown around."

"He said I'd be staying? I suppose he meant until a ship called in."

"I—I didn't get that impression."

"Well—look here, Mellhuish. What's all the mystery? Where's Thelma? What was all that nonsense you were handing me at lunch yesterday? Does that have any bearing on all this? And you still haven't told me what goes on here."

A voice, the hard incisive voice, of Thornton, cut in from the open door behind Glenn.

"I can answer those questions for you, Mr. Glenn. In fact, I shall be happy to do so."

Glenn swung round. Thornton, today wearing a white suit that still did nothing to tear him away from Wall Street, was standing just inside the shadow. For the first moment, Glenn missed the gun in his hand. Then he saw it, a .357 Magnum, and froze. That could drill a hole in a battleship.

He swallowed. "What's the idea of the artillery? "

"Just a precaution, young man. I wouldn't want an accident. This is insurance."

"Yeah," Glenn said, relieved now that danger had shown itself openly. "But on whose life?"

Thornton did not smile. He jerked the gun and they all walked through the shed to the far end. Mellhuish looked miserable. Thornton, his square smooth face exquisitely barbered, appeared to be enjoying himself hugely. The fat perspiring man rose as they entered the lab. His cheeks were flabby and flesh shook on him as he moved.

"Doctor Selkirk, I believe we shall be able to show Mr. Glenn an interesting experiment today." Thornton was almost rubbing his hands, and Glenn had a sudden quirkish desire to offer to hold the gun to allow him to do so. Doctor Selkirk waddled up to the group. Watching the walk, Glenn felt sure he had been the man seen last night on the beach.

"What particular—experiment—had you in mind?"

"I wish to convince Mr. Glenn that the processes he dignifies as thought and logic are in fact useless. That there is a higher power, a greater freedom—I think, Selkirk, I can arrange an extremely educative exhibition. Very."

Thornton jerked his gun and Glenn obediently went through the lab. Outside the far end the sun beat harshly on his back. In the ground he saw a pit with steep, incurved sides. For a wild moment he thought he was to be sacrificed or something equally gruesome in there. Then Thornton sniggered.

"Do not panic, Mr. Glenn. That hole is not for you."

Glenn hated himself for the wash of relief that flowed over him. Then the greasy Selkirk came out with a hypodermic needle glittering in a velvet box. Mellhuish appeared cradling a floppy eared, powder-bobbed rabbit. Glenn stared, intrigued despite his own position. Thornton took up a position on the edge of the pit and motioned Glenn to stand beside him. It was very hot. The sound of the waves came as a constant accompaniment to every other noise.

"Mr. Glenn, you chose to dispute with me that thought and logic are ruining the human race. I say they are. To prove it I propose to show you what happens when an animal of known unintelligence is faced with a dilemma involving another creature of superior intelligence—and death." He jerked his hand. Selkirk lifted the hypo and, with Mellhuish firmly gripping the rabbit, drove the needle home over the animal's backbone. At once, it ceased to struggle. Its eyes were bright.

"The rabbit has been injected with my serum. I can tell you

that this serum short-circuits the thinking part of the brain—a section which even the lower orders possess.” His voice was hard and unemotional. “Now the rabbit is going to face a problem. All right, Mellhuish—dump him in.”

The self-styled engineer dropped the rabbit into the pit. Selkirk, his greasy face a palpitating mass of expectancy, peered over the edge.

And then Glenn saw it.

Three feet of brilliant, scaly colour, slick and shining. As though it had been varnished. Wedge shaped head, with forked tongue flickering—he felt physically ill.

“You can’t let that thing get at the rabbit!” he heard himself shouting. The snake hissed hideously.

“Be quiet, Glenn! Control yourself!”

He stared wildly at the pit. The rabbit had moved sluggishly towards the centre—on the first hiss of the snake, sliding disturbed from its nest under one shaded wall, the rabbit swung suddenly round on its long hind-legs. The snake hissed again, moving forward with a confident, sliding motion that told all the watching world that here stalked death.

Glenn’s mouth parched up. The snake was so obviously a killer, deadly, efficient, ruthless. The rabbit—well, the rabbit was just that, a rabbit; due for hypnotism and death.

The snake flowed, coiling, rearing slightly, ready for—there was a greyish-brownish blur in the pit. Glenn had a confused impression of a furry body with many long hindlegs thrashing and pounding. He saw the tail of the snake jerk and writhe—the head was lost amidst this strange flurry of dust and pounding limbs.

Then the rabbit appeared again. It loped off to one side of the pit. There was blood on its hind feet. The snake’s head was a battered, unrecognisable pulp. Someone tossed down a lettuce leaf and the rabbit began calmly to chew.

Glenn let out a long slow breath. He realised that he’d been holding it since his last shout.

“Very interesting,” Thornton said. “You see, Selkirk—he just wants to eat his lettuce leaf, even now. *That’s* the fascinating thing.” His words were meticulous.

To Glenn, that was the most horrible thing of all. That, after the fight, the animal murder, the main interest was on whether the rabbit would eat lettuce leaves or not. It was rather like seeing whether the executed man wore a toupe or not. “Can you explain?” he said shakily.

“With pleasure. But come along, I need a drink.”

"So do I, after that."

Walking up the path, almost as though they were old friends, the gun seemed incongruous to Glenn. Thornton was speaking. "You see, my dear fellow, that rabbit had its slowing down processes short-circuited. Instead of trying to think the problem through with the pitifully inadequate equipment provided by nature, which simply means that it gets bogged down in ifs and buts, I was able to give it instantaneous decisions. The result of that, you saw. The snake, trying to think the next move up, didn't have a chance."

"That's even worse nonsense than last night," Glenn said, deliberately falling in with the general mood and trying to argue this thing coolly and collectedly. "Animals do things by instinct. They don't think out the next step. And that rabbit-dope could have been any sort of heart-stimulant."

"Would a heart-stimulant have enabled a gibbon to have unlocked a combination lock?"

That stumped Glenn.

Thornton went on: "The amount of brain power we have is obviously a concomitant to what we can do. Man can think more for himself, which means that he can do more for himself: but if he were to remove the encumbrance of *thinking* about what he was going to do, and let the brain take over, then he could do so much more."

"How long have you had these crazy ideas?"

"If you mean, how long have I known that man's brain must be short-circuited around this thinking complex—about six years. My company has set up this island base; I have loyal workpeople." He waved the gun. "Some less loyal than others, I am afraid."

For the moment, Glenn let that pass. It might refer to Thelma, or it might mean Melhuish. He was becoming fascinated by this crazy man's ideas. For, of course, they were crazy, weren't they? Yet, everyone was so calm and sane about it. Especially Thelma, whom he'd have felt inclined to believe more than the others. Selkirk was the only rotten apple. An old recollection, jumping out of nowhere, came back to him.

"Wasn't there a case once of three rabbits being caught in a snake pit?" he said slowly. "Two of them ran and the third jumped on the back of the python—the two who ran were killed, of course. But the third one, he stayed there until the python went to sleep, then jumped off to safety."

Thornton nodded affably. "A remarkable memory for someone without special interest, Mr. Glenn. That happened at the Houston Zoo, about 1938—I *am* interested, of course."

"Is that true?" broke in Mellhuish.

"Perfectly true, I assure you." Thornton smiled.

"But it still doesn't explain the fact that animals operate from instinct and sensory-stimuli—unlike humans who work out their problems." Glenn was becoming tied up in this.

"Precisely," Thornton said. "By a process of trial and error, by a chain of so-called logical steps, a man will work out a problem. Which could be solved in no time at all if he cut out this great mass of palpitating grey cells in his skull and allowed his inner brain to work."

"Oh—I see," Glenn tried to stop from being sarcastic. "You're one of the 'human brain is a perfect mechanism but we've had traumatic experiences which cripple it' boys, are you? When did you put that rabbit on the couch?"

"Mr. Glenn, your attitude might surprise me if I were not aware that your last stupid remark was born from your pitiful attempts to think this problem out. The people you mention still insist that the brain is a thinking mechanism—a point of view which is completely wrong."

"Oh, come now—if the brain isn't a thinking device, then what do we have it for?"

"I'll answer that in another way." Thornton paused on the slope and turned to stare out to sea. "Animals evolve. Natural selection determines which survive and which die out. Some animals specialise. You know that specialisation means ultimate death. It is only because of over-specialisation that we don't have many old-type life-forms with us today."

"That's perfectly true," Glenn said impatiently. "But it doesn't answer my question. And, anyway, man is the unspecialised animal—he is adaptable for anything and anywhere."

Thornton laughed. Even Mellhuish and Selkirk made sounds indicative of cheerful contempt.

"That is the crux of it all." Thornton shaded his eyes against the glare off the sea. "Man has specialised. He has developed a disproportionately large brain. And because of it he'll die out."

Glenn just didn't know what to say. Then, trying to remain calm, he said: "Utter rubbish! It's man's brain that brought him up out of the mud, gave him warmth and shelter and regular food. You must have lost your own mind, to talk like this! And I'd like an explanation of this whole set-up! Just why the gun? And will you send a radio message asking for a ship to pick me up—or, better, an aeroplane, I can pay—"

The gun came forward and prodded Glenn's stomach. Thornton's square face seemed to curl inwards, to grow hard and bitter and hating. His lips thinned and quivered.

"I haven't lost my mind, Glenn! I may not want this great appendage of brain—but my mind is whole! I wouldn't say anything like that again, if you want to stay alive."

So he'd been caught on a raw spot—Glenn filed that away for future use and repeated his questions about the plane.

"I have other plans for you, Glenn," Thornton said, his voice still jagged with his previous anger. The gun still pointed at Glenn's stomach. "There has been no signal sent to anyone about you—no-one knows you are here. As far as the world is concerned, you crashed at sea!"

Mellhuish moved, and then became still. Selkirk said oilily: "The final test, Mr. Thornton?"

"Of course," Thornton snapped, his face frozen.

Glenn didn't need to be told how to add two and two. Even if Thornton said thinking was for the birds. When a serum is tried on animals, but is really intended for men, well—someone has to be the human hamster. It looked like Glenn had got himself fingered for that job, too. He tried to smile, and messed it up: his face slipped all askew.

He started to protest again. Thornton cut him off abruptly. "You will please go to your room. Doctor Selkirk will escort you." Thornton handed the gun to the oily man. He took it with pleasure, and Glenn formed a resolution not to prod the doctor too far—the man would obviously like to use the weapon. Then they went up to the little two-roomed house.

At the door, Glenn paused, turning to shade his eyes and peer over the sea. His guess was confirmed. A ship was heading in to the island. Smoke made a wavery ink-blot against the blue.

"Inside," Selkirk said, jerking the gun. "I don't want any trouble from you." So this fat creature was nervous. That might be very interesting—and useful. Glenn went inside.

He sat at the table, and Selkirk motioned him to the bed. "You sit on the bed. I'll use the chair and table."

"Okay, fatso," Glenn said casually.

"That'll be enough lip out of you." Selkirk's face was strained. He took out a handkerchief and mopped himself off.

"Say, doc, you don't really believe all that guff old man Thornton hands out, do you?"

"If you are insinuating that I merely kow-tow to Mr. Thornton,

or am a sycophant to his ideas, you are wrong." Selkirk breathed hard in the mid-day heat. "As a matter of fact, I developed that serum. It was all my work."

"Oh," Glenn said quickly. "Thornton is stealing your ideas and picking your brains, huh?"

"Keep quiet!" Selkirk moved on the chair. He fiddled round for a cigarette.

"Well, if you want to sit down under that sort of treatment—" began Glenn. He didn't finish. Selkirk, a look of glazed anger on his face, stood up and reached across with the gun in a slashing back-handed cut at Glenn's face. Glenn went across the bed, blood pouring from a gash down his cheek.

"You swine!" panted Selkirk. He lifted the gun again.

Glenn kicked him in the stomach. It was not difficult, lying across the bed as he was, to put his foot in the fat man's guts. Selkirk retched and fell back. The gun exploded, the bullet punching a hole through the rattan covered window. Glenn took the gun in his right hand, twisted, brought the gun round and slammed the barrel along Selkirk's temple. The fat man quit. He slumped across the floor, unconscious.

"Some people," panted Glenn, standing over him. "Some people don't like being told they are toadies, pandering to their boss. So they react. They try to knock someone else about. And, of course, it only brings them grief. That's thinking. That's reasoning. Only, of course, your mob don't believe in that." And then he ran outside and raced into the island vegetation. He paused just inside the cool shadow.

Men came hurrying up. They took Selkirk down to the hospital. Someone shouted an order and they looked into the second room. Startled, Glenn saw the silver sheen of hair, heard a girl's voice denying vehemently something they accused her of. So Thelma was a prisoner too!

Later, when two parties had vanished into the trees, carrying guns, Glenn ventured out and sneaked down to the house.

There was a guard, a muscle-bound fellow with a rifle.

Glenn hit him neatly behind the ear with the Magnum and dragged the body backwards into the room. Thelma gave a little squeak, then Glenn said roughly: "Come on! No time for pleasant chit-chat." They ran out. Glenn picked up the rifle.

"We'll make for the mountain," panted Glenn. "Then we can creep down to the jetty when that ship docks and talk to the skipper. He'll give us passage home. And I'll be glad to get away from this

mad-house."

Thelma didn't reply at once. Then she said: "I don't think that's much good. We're bound to be caught."

"Well, why come with me?"

They were walking hurriedly through the shadows of the palms now. The ground began to trend upwards.

"Mr. Thornton will let some of his hounds loose."

"Bloodhounds?"

"No, of course not. But if he injects them with the serum, then they will find us in nothing flat. I know. I've seen what animals can do once their thinking processes have been blocked off by science."

Glenn didn't bother to reply to that. They pressed on, climbing, coming out of the line of trees. It was still hot and very soon he needed a drink. The lack of water worried him. They would have to last out until the ship docked this evening; it shouldn't be too rugged. They paused in the shadow of a rocky outcrop to fling themselves down, panting. Below the bay had opened out, the headlands curving like horns, and the ship crept like a toy model across a waxen sea.

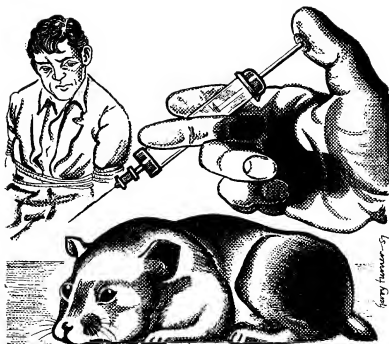
"So thinking great thoughts is for the dicky birds," Glenn said. He wanted to stimulate Thelma, get her mind off their predicament—there would be rough stuff ahead for both of them before this affair became history.

"Of course," she said tartly. "Man specialised his brain into the cumbersome great thing it is, thinking, logic, system, the scientific method—when all the time the essentials were there for instantaneous action on stimuli. A baby has enough strength in its arms to support its own weight just after it is born. As soon as its brain goes into action and tells it that Mother won't let it fall—it loses that strength as being unnecessary. We lose a great many other faculties by thinking we do not need them."

"Psi sciences?" hazarded Glenn, watching the track.

"No, they're just attempts to do tricks with this brain of ours. We can do many things if we can short out—" She stopped speaking. Glenn had pushed the rifle forward, staring down towards the tree line. Dogs and men streamed out. Glenn half-rose, lifted the rifle.

Without any warning beyond the rustling flash of mighty wings, the rifle twisted from Glenn's fingers, whipped upwards. He staggered. Looking up with a panicky expectancy of anything in the horror catalogue, he saw a heavy bird, a hawk most probably, flying quickly away with the rifle between its talons. He drew the Magnum,



aimed it. A second hawk slanted down. Glenn dodged, throwing his left arm over his head. The bird slashed a talon down his forearm, took the Magnum in the other claw. In the confusion the bird failed to take the gun cleanly. It skittered across the rocks.

For a long spasm of time there seemed that nothing moved. The silence was thunderous. Then everything came to life again.

Thelma's scream bounced from the rocks as Glenn dived for the gun. The hawk's angry screech of rage and its flailing pinions battered at Glenn. He got his finger tips to the trigger guard and then the men and dogs from the trees piled all over him. They dragged him, bruised and bleeding, to stare into the scornfully triumphant eyes of Thornton.

"Thinking again, Mr. Glenn?" And then they dragged him back to the laboratory.

So the hawks had been injected with this super-scientific serum and had turned into super-birds; at least, into birds with enough savvy to act on orders to take the guns away from him. Glenn, sitting bound into a chair in the long laboratory, wanted to rub his face where he had scraped it against the rocks. He was in a nasty jam, and, just at the moment, he didn't see any way out. Even if he could break

free the pepped-up animals would find him quickly, and the ship's captain had turned out to be a Thornton employee. Thornton certainly had built up a fine company with his money and acumen piled in to reinforce his own aggressive personality. Glenn began to feel that something would come of this serum; that Thornton wouldn't be stopped. And—should he be stopped? He wasn't mad, was he?

Selkirk was a different proposition. The fat man was a creep. Mincing with the affected airs of gentry, his eyes set too close together—these oddities wouldn't have mattered if the man had had any moral fibre. As it was, he toadied to Thornton all the time, Thornton took the products of his brain and between them they presented formidable opposition to a man like Glenn, who thought the war was over. He tested the bonds around him for the twentieth time. But, even if he escaped the laboratory—where would he go?

Selkirk, as if answering an unheard waiters' bell, came in. His greasy face made Glenn feel sick. Selkirk wasted no time. He began to prepare hypodermic needles, cleaning and sterilizing and filling with serum. Glenn swallowed.

"Where's Miss Lansdowne?" he asked.

Selkirk, abstractedly, concentrating on what he was doing, slapped Glenn across the face, went on with his work. That worried Glenn. He knew that Selkirk was the sort of creature that delights in revenge; he wouldn't miss an opportunity to rough the aviator up—and yet he was concentrating on the serum.

When Thornton and Mellhuish came in, ready for the experiment Glenn said evenly: "Thornton, if you want an impartial test here, I'd suggest you check what's in those hypo needles."

"What do you mean?" Selkirk blazed, his face red, his shifty eyes flickering from side to side. "I'm the scientist here, not some glory-mad flyer."

Thornton held up a hand, his face puzzled. Mellhuish said: "I think we ought to carry out a check, Mr. Thornton."

Glenn didn't miss the swift look of hatred from Selkirk. Jim Mellhuish had just made an enemy.

Thornton snapped his fingers and a hamster was brought from a cage. Glenn uneasily caught the quick flash of cunning triumph on Selkirk's face. He became convinced that what he suspected was fact. The hamster was placed on a bench, Mellhuish holding it and soothing it, and Selkirk picked up a needle. Glenn took a deep breath.

"I don't think—" he began, then stopped. A better way had occurred to him. "Do you know where the serum is kept?" he asked

Mellhuish. The engineer nodded, puzzled, and Thornton said: "Please keep quiet, Glenn. You will be able to talk later." He nodded to Selkirk to go on.

Glenn stood up, chair and all, threw himself sideways and came down with a crashing uproar across Selkirk and his case of needles. Someone's shout was lost in the melee and Glenn realised it was himself shouting. The chair rolled over and he saw the fat sweating face of Selkirk below him. He put a foot expertly into the fat man's mouth. Then he was jerked back and chair and all thrust against the wall.

The hypodermic needles lay all smashed across the floor.

"Now we'll have real serum in those needles," Glenn panted, bright eyed, his hair over his face.

Almost berserk with rage, his mouth a stump-toothed scarlet blodge. Selkirk lunged at Glenn. He hit him twice and then Mellhuish twisted the fat man round and thrust him stumbling over the floor. Thornton was visibly enraged by all this byplay.

"The quicker my serum is developed and put on the market as a mental panacea," he snapped, "the better it will be for the world, especially for brawling idiots like you! I've just been treated to a shameful exhibition from supposedly grown and mature men; and it absolutely bears out what I have been telling you, Glenn—thinking is—"

"Shut up!" Glenn shouted. "You silly, vain, posturing old fool! You don't think I was thinking when I hit that fat slob, do you? That was the old thalamus taking over."

"When we cut that out—" Thornton started.

"You're going to cut out an almighty lot of the brain, aren't you, Thornton? What do you plan to leave—the spinal column? And, anyway, while we're talking about this—" he nodded painfully to where Mellhuish and Selkirk, glaring, were washing themselves off at a sink—"don't you and your men think all the time? Aren't you thinking when you decide what you'll do next? Don't interrupt! If you have all this confidence that the brain can operate better on a small scale and without the benefit of logical systems of thought—then why don't you use the serum yourself?"

Thornton calmly took a cigarette case from his pocket, selected a cigarette, returned the case, and then crumpled the cigarette into brown shreds. "Because I'm not one hundred per cent sure that it is safe! I assure you, Mr. Glenn, I would rather I didn't have to use you as a guinea pig, unfortunately you are the only person handy—and no-one will know whether you died by crashing into the sea—or from any

ill-effects of the serum. Selkirk! Are you ready yet?"

Selkirk bustled up, not looking at Glenn, carrying freshly-filled syringes. Mellhuish put a hand on Glenn's shoulder, squeezed, then went back to watch Selkirk with a hard eye. Glenn appreciated the feelings of these men; but that didn't help any. Here he was, about to be offered up on the altar of scientific progress—and progress in a direction to which he was completely opposed. At least, trying to think coherently to take his mind off the preparations which he now knew he could not prevent, he was opposed to what these men were doing, wasn't he? Thornton, for all his bombast and icy self-possession all jumbled together, was a man with the ring of sincerity about him. And Jim Mellhuish had proved himself a friend. As for Thelma—well, they'd been forced to restrain her in case she said too much to him and upset their apple-cart. Altogether, a hodge-podge that defied logical analysis. Defied the thinking, to which these scientists were so bitterly opposed, into the bargain. Glenn was aroused, suddenly and with near panic clawing at him, by the prick of the needle.

Without fuss, the serum entered his blood, to be carried all over his body, and into his brain.

"How long does the effect last?" Glenn asked.

"About an hour or so," Thornton's voice came in segments through to Glenn's consciousness, as though he were hearing it behind venetian blinds and the words were sunshine, which was a stupid sort of concept, at the best of times.

And—this was the best of times!

He felt positively wonderful. Better than that, in fact. Bubbles rose inside him, to burst and break open with rainbow colours spreading into every corner of his brain. What was he doing on this Island, anyway? Before the question could even form, the answer came that he wanted to get away and continue with his trans-world flight. There seemed to be bonds restraining him—he broke them without thought and went out to the porch of the laboratory. He was vaguely aware of the other men gasping and cowering back—and of the radiant smile of utter satisfaction on the face of Thornton.

The trans-world flight. Yes. That was it.

Glenn extended his arms, stuck his chest and chin out and took off. He circled the island once, picking up his bearings, then hurtled off directly towards Australia.

Wind buffeted him mildly, there were no ill-effects. Without thinking about it he kept his speed just sub-sonic and three-quarters of an hour plus one minute twenty-nine seconds later—he knew the

elapsed time accurately without conscious effort—he slanted down to a landing on a deserted beach with a town just round the curve of bay.

His brain appeared to be encased in a block of ice and felt completely natural and a part of him—at once he was more vividly aware of it than ever before and yet accepted it without question. You don't feel any part of yourself unless that part is painful or damaged or diseased—wait!

He was thinking!

Glenn slumped dejectedly to the sand.

He felt like a squeezed flat tube of toothpaste. All that brilliance, that verve, that sheer ability to live to the fullest—all that had evaporated. Even what had happened was blurring, like images behind rain-swept glass.

He stared at the sand. Starting four yards up from the white surf and running across the hot sand to where he now lay, a line of plunging footprints lay mockingly shadowed against the golden beach.

“So it happened, then,” he said out loud.

Abruptly, he could recall everything clearly. He had been injected with the serum. It had worked—worked far beyond the power of thought to comprehend. Levitation or whatever mental process had brought him here to Australia clear across the ocean was certainly something that could not be explained away by modern science. The serum that Thornton was processing would one day be offered for sale on the market—Thornton had said that.

Thinking—archaic word!—about it, he saw the possibilities, saw the future, saw that, handled right, this could be a very big thing indeed. So big that he'd have to stop thinking about it and allow the serum to short out his thinking circuits, train himself up to allowing his brain to handle the questions . . . standing up, Glen began to walk slowly up the beach.

Presently, he began to run.

He waved his arm and the car passing at the head of the beach stopped, tyres crunching pebbles. The Aussie leaned out, smiling.

“Where's the fire, digger?”

“Got to get to town,” Glenn panted. “Got to hire a plane. There's an island I have to re-visit.”

Only then did he think of Thelma. That made two reasons—and it was extraordinarily stimulating to think of Thelma when they both gave up thinking for life.



New Hard-Cover Science-Fiction Reviewed by

KENNETH F. SLATER

Many efforts by anthologists, editors and experts (self-styled and otherwise) to formulate a "definite" definition of science-fiction literature ignore one point. One point of very great importance. Too many of the people engaged in offering these definitions and counter-definitions omit to check the dictionary for the accepted definition of "science," but take as a basis the meaning which they have personally given to that term—a meaning which is often inaccurate, and also contrary to the "personal" meanings given to the term by others engaged in the argument. I'd recommend you to look the word "science" up in a good dictionary, notice that it covers quite a lot more than a reference to the physical sciences, and then think the matter over and let me have your definition. Just drop me a postcard or a twenty-four page letter in care of Nebula SF....

Anyway, the point is that some of the books I review here do not fit in with anyone's definition of

s-f, but I still feel that they are of interest to the s-f reader in the larger sense. Please bear with me when I happen to mention some work which is way outside your frame of reference for s-f—if I tried to stay inside some of those "frames" I'd soon have to pack up; I have a letter here from one reader who tells me, categorically, that if space travel is not involved, the story is not science-fiction!

If you are in any way inclined to agree with that, don't read **BROTHER BEAR**, by Guy Richards (Michael Joseph, 206pp, 12/6). In this novel General Ketov, Commander of the Russian Army's First Special Corps, invades and occupies a large section of New York. Unofficially! In the General's own words 'Remember that the moment our manoeuvre turns into a war *we will have failed!*' The Americans are flabbergasted at the impudence of this invasion, successfully carried out without a single casualty on either side; the

Russians disown General Ketov and his troops; everyone (except the General) is alarmed and extremely puzzled. Just what the General was attempting I'll leave you to discover when you read the book; but bear in mind that it is not "s-f" in the sense of any supermen, superweapons or even superpolitics being involved. The action could take place tomorrow—or even have started last week—so far as the time element is concerned. But it is a book which I recommend to the wider-minded s-f reader, a book with a strong satirical flavour, with humour and tragedy. And entertaining even if you don't like s-f!

The name of T. H. White is well-known to the fantasy fan, if not to the s-f reader. Mr. White is one of those authors who are popular with the literate public in general, and yet have written many books with a special appeal to the fantasy reader. *THE MASTER* (Jonathan Cape, 256 pp, 15/-) resides on Rockall, that isolated mountain top projecting above the sea someplace betwixt Britain and Iceland which features often in the "Shipping Forecast" of weather. With him are sundry subsidiary characters (of whom only four attain any prominence in the story) and the vibrators with which he will subdue the world and lead it on the rightful path.

The Master is something of a superman—an adept at a form of mind control, extremely aged (165 at least), and a bit of a whiz all round. His chief aide, a Chinese gentleman, is also a budding superman, but not a patch on the Master.

To Rockall come the children of the Duke of Lancaster, the latter gentleman having a desire to land on Rockall mainly because it is almost impossible to land on Rockall (White's characters are so human as to caricature humanity), and being children they explore and discover a door to the hallowed interior where hide The Master and his employees. Naturally, Nicky and Judy, with their dog Jokey, are captured and hidden away by the dwellers in the rock, and in due course the Duke, resigned to their loss in the sea, departs.

The story starts from here, with the children attempting to escape and, after they have discovered the Master's intentions, to defeat him; the other major characters—the doctor, the Chinaman and the helicopter pilot—all try to use the children as tools to defeat the Master for their own private ends. The Master foils all these various attempts, and is almost successful in carrying his own plans to a conclusion; just why he fails is not to be disclosed here and is a

typical T. H. White move in the guessing game he plays with his readers.

You'll have gathered that the science-fiction content of the story is pretty simple, and the plot is not exactly spectacular. But from my viewpoint the charm and interest of Mr. White's writings is their simple humanity, and the novelty of many of his concepts—the needles of gauges “lay most of the time as still as crocodiles on a sand bank”!

This book is not likely to appeal to the more mechanistic science-fiction addict, but for those of you who have read Mr. White's Arthurian fantasies, or the Lilliputian romance of *Mistress Masham's Repose*, with enjoyment, here is another helping of the same served with a sauce of science-fiction instead of fantasy.

There can be no argument about **THE DEEP RANGE** (Muller, 224pp, 13/6), which is Arthur C. Clarke's latest contribution to science-fictional literature. Even my correspondent who rules that “space” is an essential must accept that—indirectly—his conditions are satisfied. Before the story starts the hero was a spaceman. When the story opens it happens that he is just restarting life as a member of World Food Organisation,

Marine Division, Bureau of Whales!

Walter Franklin was involved in an accident which has made him unfit for further service in space; further, it has cut him off from his family who are Martian second- and third-generation colonists and therefore unable to live on Franklin's home world, Terra. Franklin, on Earth, cannot go to space again. Rehabilitation on Earth is therefore essential, and the Marine Division is the place for Walt, it is decided. Walt's personal affairs provide a counterpoint to the larger theme of the story; the development of the sources of food in the sea. The ocean is becoming a popular theme for science-fiction stories today, and so there is nothing new in Mr. Clarke's major concepts. But there was nothing new about a flight to the moon, or a trip to Mars—except Mr. Clarke's descriptive and convincing writing ability—when he wrote **PRELUDE TO SPACE** and **SANDS OF MARS**. . . ! I think the best way to sum up my opinion on this book is simply to say ‘He's done it again!’ Highly recommended.

PRISONERS OF SATURN by Donald Suddaby (Bodley Head, 190pp, illus., 12/6) is a juvenile, undisguised. It can still be read with pleasure by the more open-minded adult s-f addict,

because Mr. Suddaby has an accomplished narrative style, which holds the interest. A most unusual style of space vessel is being constructed by a joint American-British-Russian team, and by a series of minor happenings the narrator—a musician—becomes involved with the team and is invited along on the voyage to Saturn. On arrival, Saturn proves to be a most unexpected kind of place, and even less expected is the fact that it is inhabited. By living clouds (this is not original, of course, but some of Mr. Suddaby's concepts in the book are certainly novel) who develop a pseudo-human to communicate with the Earthmen, and act as their instructor and guide.

Moral arguments follow, the Earthmen coming out of these somewhat the worse, and finally they decide on escape, an act which is accomplished after some trouble. On their return to Earth they discover that the "trouble" was faked, and that in fact they had been intended to return—accompanied by two of the clouds who promptly remove all possibility of the Earthmen repeating the construction of the space vessel, by destroying the plans, buildings and all information concerning the ship—including the information held in the minds of the builders. Amusing, well illustrated in a style peculiar to Harold Jones, and recommended for the younger s-f reader.

Mention must also be made of pb editions of SHE, by H. Rider Haggard (Hodder & Stoughton, 2/-), MEN, MARTIANS AND MACHINES by Eric Frank Russell (Corgi, 2/6); and of A LAND FIT FOR 'EROS by John Atkins and J. B. Pick (Arco, 224pp, 15/-). Only give your attention to the latter if, in addition to fantasy, you have an addiction to MAD Comics, shaggy dog stories and the Goon Show. For some reason there seems to be a very high proportion of fantasy fans with this additional interest. It might be interesting to conduct a survey...but then, Messrs. Atkins & Pick seem to have done something similar already!

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SCIENTI FILM PREVIEWS

News and advance Film Reviews direct from Hollywood's

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

Stop Press Flash! Just had a phone call from Ray Bradbury, who in turn is waiting on a trans-Atlantic tele-ring from Carol Reed. If I didn't need my fingers to type this column with, I'd be keeping them crossed that the deal goes thru, which is—and you *NEBULA* readers are the first to know it—the prospective picturization of “And The Rock Cried Out.” This Bradbury yarn appears as the third and final story in the *FAHRENHEIT 451* volume: a powerful 26-page character study of an American and his wife in Mexico, 1963, when the white population of the world is almost wiped out over night by, at last, the Hot War. The *gringos* from *norteamerica* are now strangers—and afraid—in a brown man's world they. . . never made? A suspenseful, science-fictional social document, whose translation to the screen could mean another trip to England for its author and the possibility of Ray Bradbury participating in the 15th World SF Convention in London this autumn.

Mine eyes have seen a surfeit of pseudo and so-so science fiction films in the immediate past. Do any of you readers ever pause and shed a tear for this poor

previewer and how he has to suffer in order to keep you informed? Ah, the curse of completism! To *have* to view PHARAOH'S CURSE on top of a million mummy pictures that have gone before, and watch Gus-from-the-sarcophagus drag his poor dessicated carcass around for the required number of reels. At only 5 minutes over an hour, this picture still runs—or crawls—too long. In between nods, I noted that they couldn't keep it straight in the dialog whether the resurrected romeo with feet of clay—in fact clay all the way—had been dead 3000 years or 4. An additional fantastic element was the off-beat casting of Ziva Rodann, an Israeli siren, as a reincarnated Egyptian cat-goddess from old Cairo town. A real schizophrenic role.

And as if VOODOO ISLAND wasn't torture enough, imagine having to sit thru VOODOO WOMAN too in the same month. Both unreel for the identical unreal 77 minutes. There is not much to pick and choose between them. In the former, Boris Karloff, the old past-master of horror, does a past muster job as an auctorial debunker of supernatural situations. By picture's end a couple of Karloff's associates have been

zombified or eaten alive by a carnivorous plant, and he has come to realize, there in the wilds of Hawaii, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in Hollywood's philosophy. In the other epic of voo-doom, marsh-Marla English melts for a mad scientist (Tom Conway) who is experimenting on the Dr. Jungle and Mr. Hyde formula. Conway in some way that wasn't quite clear to me cons comely Miss Marla into letting her lily white body be monsterified, so that she'll have all the best qualities of man and beast, or all the beast qualities of woman and bust, or—must I go on? Lucky Paul Blaisdell, the sci-fi fan and professional artist, actor and monster-maker who metamorphosed for Marla in *THE SHE-CREATURE*, again plays her hideous half.

You may get a laugh out of *THE UNDEAD*, a ham-and-corn concoction that time-tracks back on the Bridey Murphy special to the 9th Century. The gal who goes back over a thousand years via the hypno-regression route finds herself run a-foul of a real honest-to-Satan witch who actually conjures up the Devil at one point in the devilish proceedings. A time is portrayed in which, to believe the picture, witches actually could and did turn into bats, and things like that. Gimmick is the respectable enough s.f. problem of parallel worlds and creating a crack in the world-continuum if one makes a different choice, given a second chance. Our heroine is faced with having to lose her head in the past in order to keep the present safe for the BBC and Elvis Presley, the kilt,

and the Loch Ness monster, rock 'n' roll and calypso, institutions like Walter Willis, and other wonders of the modern world like the *monthly NEBULA*.

ZOMBIES OF MORA TAU is not worth the time of the linotypist who sets this line to say so. Another *no* is *ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTERS*, just too damn silly for words, with a virtual reversion to the African superstition that to eat an enemy's heart makes one strong—that sort of thing—when the crusty old crustacean colossi take on the memories, vocal intonations, etc., of each individual they devour. On a remote Pacific island the radioactive-after-effects of atomic fallout have mutated a couple of crabs into kingsize carnivores, each of whom just adores man-meat cocktails. Meanly, the hero and heroine refuse to add their avoirdupois to the Cause and be absorbed by the King Kongs of Crabdom, being too absorbed in each other.

THE SHE-DEVIL, adapted from Stanley Weinbaum's old goodie, "The Adaptive Ultimate," should have been better than it is. Once Kyra Zelas realizes she has become a beautiful human chameleon, invulnerable and invincible, she should have given the world a worse time.

THE MAN WHO TURNED TO STONE is an immortality yarn of a small survival group of scientists who instituted longevity experiments in the 18th century, and is halfway worthwhile. If you can catch it on a double bill with *NOT OF THIS EARTH*, you may consider you saw one acceptable scientifilm between them.



WALTER WILLIS writes for you

It's curious, but the people who are most sceptical about flying saucers are us oldtime science fiction fans. Most of us would be only too happy to believe in visits from extra-terrestrials, but we've been thinking about the possibility long enough to know that there's something wrong with those queer books about little green men illustrated by blurry photographs of lampshades. Things just don't happen that way. If alien intelligences were really to contact us it wouldn't be in such a hole and corner fashion: it would be the sensation of the century. Or else, come to think of it.

You know, Earth has been invaded thousands of times in science fiction and we have valiantly overcome the fiendish aliens in just about every conceivable way—with courage, microbes, atomic energy, bluff, psionics, guerrilla warfare, passive resistance, subversion and clever gadgets cooked up in underground laboratories by the hero's fiancée's father. But there is one dreadful weapon no one seems to have thought of yet. The dead hand of bureaucracy.

I wouldn't be surprised if at this moment there lies in some government office a highly secret file containing full details of an

alien invasion that happened only last month. It won't come to light for another 25 years, when some energetic clerk moves it out of the cupboard to make more room for the teapot, but I can see it now.

It starts, of course, with a report from the Police. An alien spaceship, proceeding in the direction of down, has landed in sub-district 14 and issued an ultimatum: surrender or be vapourised by horrible green rays. The police have confined themselves to keeping it secret, diverting traffic round it and asking for instructions from Whitehall. Now this may come as a shock to some innocent voters, and don't tell your MP I told you, but I have it on good authority that Cabinet Ministers do not themselves answer the phone in their Departments or open letters. Everything comes to them pre-digested by the Civil Service. So this police report comes to a civil servant in the Registry, where papers are sorted and they decide who should deal with them. "Invasion ultimatum" he reads. Of course, the Foreign Office deals with all that sort of thing. He packs the papers off to them and goes back to his indexing. To his surprise, they arrive back with bewildering speed. It has

taken the Foreign Office a mere three weeks to decide that the matter isn't for them. Their function, they point out in a lot more than as many words, is to handle the negotiations of Her Majesty's Government with the accredited representatives of recognised foreign governments. The alleged government of the alleged planet Xtyzzll has not been accorded either *de facto* or *de jure* recognition. Since its alleged emissaries are actually in this country, moreover, it is obviously a matter of internal security, like the IRA. Finally, they point out blandly that the Home Office already has a Division specially for dealing with aliens arriving in the country without passports. The Registry official tries the Security Division; they report that MI5 has the aliens under surveillance but they don't seem to be doing anything subversive or even committing any offence except holding up traffic: perhaps the Ministry of Transport. . . ? The Ministry of Transport say that as a matter of fact the alien spaceship is correctly parked on the lefthand side of the road, it's the police that are causing the obstruction. Four months have elapsed by now and the papers are showing signs of wear. In desperation the Registry official sends them to the

Aliens Division. They reply, reasonably enough, that they are only concerned with human beings, and there's no evidence that these aliens are human. In fact, from what the Publications Division say, it seems highly unlikely. Startled, the Registry official asks the Publications Division what they know about it. He learns to his surprise that their Inspectors are quite experts on the subject. Frequently while searching bookshops for indecent literature they accidentally pick up magazines containing something known as science fiction which is full of accounts of aliens. Almost invariably they appear to be giant insects or vegetables. The wretched Registry official heaves a sigh of relief. Insects. Vegetables. Of course. Obviously a matter for the Ministry of Agriculture. He sends off the now bulky file in a large envelope marked "Insects/Vegetables" to the Ministry of Agriculture, where they are put among the papers for an Advisory Committee on the colorado beetle and are never heard of again. Once again, England has been saved by the Civil Service.

You may ask what have the aliens been doing all this time. All I can say is that all big organisations have a bureaucracy, and the aliens have their own Regulations to observe. They say to deliver an ultimatum and wait for an answer, and that's what the expedition does. They sit there quietly year after year patiently waiting, smothered in security blanket and red tape, until eventually they do succeed in getting action from the Civil Service... even if it's only the Department of Sanitation.

WALTER WILLIS

**writes for you in
every edition of**

NEBULA



GUIDED MISSIVES

Letters to the Editor

Dear Ed.: Your NEBULA has the something that most of the US mags had in the past but have lost. Every issue reminds me of the other mags of about 10 or 15 years ago. I don't mean that you have copied their style, I mean you have the type of story that lives and holds interest from start to finish. So many of the US mags have switched to the deep psycho stories, or have set themselves up a list of taboos and limited their material to such a narrow range that many of the stories are very dull.

In NEBULA we find a much greater range of stories, with wide variety evidently chosen for their entertainment value rather than the fact that they fit into the slot. Keep it up, we need mags like yours to keep Science Fiction alive. Some are trying to kill it from all appearances.

Enjoy the letter section also. As you well know many of the US mags have dropped their letter sections. Other Worlds by Ray Palmer is one of the few US mags to keep the letter sections and editorials.

I have several US mags, pocket-books, and some hard back Stf I would be willing to swap to someone in Britain for similar material. I swapped with one individual in Britain for a couple of years, but haven't heard from him for about six months, although the mags I sent have not been returned. So I will assume

that said individual does not want to swap any more and need another exchange partner.

JAMES R. HARRIS,
3326 Hampton Street,
Ashland, Kentucky.

** I have always abhorred too strict a policy when selecting stories for NEBULA, James. After all science-fiction authors and editors have the whole of space and time—to say nothing of the complex mechanism known as the human mind—to choose their story subjects from and any sameness between two stories in an issue of a science-fiction magazine is due either to thoroughly bad editing or a deplorable shortage in available material. As you remark, I try to choose my stories for their entertainment value rather than for any particular subject around which they may be written or for any slant which they may have and I am happy to see that this policy is adding to your enjoyment of the magazine.*

Dear Ed.: I have just read NEBULA No. 20 and I want to take exception in Kenneth Johns' article "The Modern Mars." In stating "Photographs have never revealed signs of canals" he is perpetuating an ancient fallacy.

Firstly, let me point out that

C. O. Lampland of the Lowell Observatory was given a medal in 1905 for the first photographs of the canals of Mars.

Secondly, I have examined myself photographs of Mars taken with the 12½ in. refractor of the McMillin Observatory of Ohio State University by Mr. Roger Hosfield which clearly show developed grains in the film lying along straight lines and in the position of well-known canals. These were routine photographs and were never given special publication since so many others of the type exist.

Thirdly, I could cite dozens of reports from astronomical literature but I will simply quote one from Dr. R. S. Richardson of Mount Wilson: "The best images of Mars 6 and 8 mm in diameter taken in orange light on August 10, show the canals *Gehon*, *Hiddekel*, *Cantabras*, *Agathadaemon*, *Genges*, *Nectar*, *Nilokeras*, *Draco*, and *Jamuna*. They appear on the negatives as light wispy streaks. From a study of these photographs and my admittedly casual visual observations made hurriedly between exposures, I am convinced of the existence of streaks on Mars at approximately the position of well-known canals." (Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, 69, 25, 1957.)

Other than this, I have no bones to pick with Mr. Johns' quite excellent article. I do think, though, that you should publish a correction about the photographability of the Martian canals.

STEEDMAN THOMPSON,
1174 Broadview Ave.,
Columbus 12, Ohio, U.S.A.

** I am extremely grateful to you for correcting the error in Kenneth Johns' article in NEBULA No. 20. I am sure I am speaking for all of our readers when I say how pleased I am that an error of this nature in one of our articles should be set right so promptly and in such interesting detail. Over to you Kenneth Johns.*

Dear Ed.: "The Great Armadas" scored for its very tense and dramatic end, after a wonderful shock question: how do we get the Terrans back on Thread? It just scraped in from Brunner's excellent "The Number of My Days," which was reminiscent of the memorable Poul Anderson story "The Big Rain." But it had the inimitable Van Dongen as illustrator while you had no one. Hunter could have done a magnificent frontispiece, and I hope that he is not in retirement. The other stories were all readable. "The Evidence" was superficial, while the last sentence of "Dumb Show" sounds wonderful yet it is plain rubbish. I liked Presslie's refreshing treatment of religion and the end of the world. The top story was not, despite your convictions, science fiction. Nevertheless it was an amazingly good, indeed scintillating ghost fantasy. It was not out of place in NEBULA at all, and I advise you most strongly to publish quality fantasy in with the science stuff. I also think every story should be illustrated by an illustration which helps support the atmosphere created by the author. Some examples of this are Hunter for Freight, Operation Mars

and Investment, Turner for This Night No More, By the Name of Man, Mansion of a Love and Into the Empty Dark, and Greengrass—Alcoholic Ambassador. There seems to be a mistaken idea among some SF artists that their job is to support the author's description, but I regard this as a lack of confidence in the powers of the author—let him sink or swim!

The cover was a welcome change of perspective, but there is no gloss on my issue which I think is a pity.

NIGEL JACKSON,

7 Hunter Road,

Camberwell, E.6.

Melbourne, Australia.

**Thanks for the letter Nigel. After the quite fantastic reader-reaction to "Whispering Gallery" by William F. Temple, I have definitely decided to publish a small proportion of high quality fantasy in NEBULA—perhaps about one short story every couple of issues or so. I have already accepted an excellent short ghost story from E. C. Tubb and an extremely humorous little fantasy by Ian Wright both of which will be appearing very soon. However, the lovers of orthodox science-fiction need have no fear, the main diet in NEBULA will continue to consist of top-line science-fiction stories by both well known and new authors.*

ONE GUINEA PRIZE

To the reader whose Ballot Form (below) is first opened at the NEBULA publishing office.

All you have to do, both to win this attractive prize and to help your favourite author win the 1957 Author's Award, is to number the stories in this issue in the order of your preference on the Ballot Form below and post it to NEBULA, 159, Crownpoint Rd., Glasgow, S.E., immediately.

Pompey's Planet	
The Window	
And so Farewell	
A Date to Remember	
Murder in Reverse	
Morality	
The Thoughtless Island	

Name and Address :

J. Nelson, of Portsmouth, wins the One Guinea Prize offered in NEBULA No. 20. The final result of the Poll on the stories in that issue was :—

1. BEACON GREEN
By F. G. Rayer 27.7%
2. ONE MAN
By D. M. Schneider 21.4%
2. BETTER THAN WE KNOW
By William F. Temple 21.4%
4. MAN OF IMAGINATION
By E. C. Tubb 19.3%
5. THE MEN MARCHED OUT
By John Ashcroft 10.2%

The result of the Poll on the stories in this issue will appear in NEBULA No. 25.

Dear Ed.: Unless Forry Ackerman's column this issue is a hoax like those glorious spaghetti orchards on T-V I'm going to steer clear of cipe-mas for a few decades. I still don't know if I was meant to laugh or cry, but Hollywood is quite capable of producing 'Blood-drinking Robot Fiends from Space' and calling the result science fiction.

JOHN ASHCROFT,

Manor House Farm,
Halsall, Nr. Ormskirk.
Lancs.

* *It seems to me that in producing this type of low grade pseudo science-fiction film, Hollywood is doing very much the same thing at the moment as several score of obscure magazine and paper back novel publishers were doing a few years ago. By releasing inferior science-fiction in any form*

these people are doing irreparable harm to the claim of science-fiction as a respectable literary form and they are also discouraging any reasonably intelligent member of the public, whose first encounter with science-fiction is with the inferior brand, from ever attempting to read anything of a better nature in the field.

It was by this process of turning out third rate material and consequently sickening the casual reading public of science-fiction, that the book publishers I have mentioned above caused the great slump in the sales of this type of literature a couple of years ago. If Hollywood persists in turning out the same type of trash another slump will be the result which may destroy science-fiction as a commercial proposition for many years to come.

NEBULA No. 23 . . .

Has it ever occurred to you, while reading improbable stories about alien beings invading the earth, that such an invasion may already be in progress without the knowledge of humanity? This is the central theme of the first novel in a brilliant new series specially written for NEBULA by William F. Temple.

Other yarns include a thrilling new fantasy short by E. C. Tubb, a really side-splitting science-fiction comedy by Ian Wright, plus other unusual stories by Philip E. High, H. Philip Stratford, etc., etc.

Order this number from your newsagent or bookseller today—it will be out August 1st—or in case of difficulty send cheque or postal order for 12s. for six monthly issues to 159 Crownpoint Road, Glasgow, S.E.

CRADLE OF STARS *Continued from inside front cover*

And it is because of this opaqueness that the stars are born. Modern theory holds that it is almost impossible for a single star to condense out of a small gas cloud because the gravitational attraction is too weak.

It is easy to grasp this by imagining the mass of the Sun spread out to over 10 million times its present volume. The escape velocity would then be only a hundredth of that of Earth and its small gravitational force could easily be overcome by gas atoms in space—hydrogen atoms are usually moving at five times this escape velocity. Dispersing outwards, they would evaporate faster than it could condense.

This means that stars are created in vast numbers. A gas cloud containing at least a thousand times the mass of the Sun is needed to create a shower of stars. Yet each of these gas clots is only a small fraction of the whole Rosette Nebula. With the greater gravitational field the cloud not only compacts more easily; each clot of gas and dust helps the others to hold together.

Even as a shower of stars is formed, so it begins to expand and lose its compactness. At first the cloud contracts slowly because it is opaque to infra-red light and the heat energy released cannot escape. But when the centre of the cloud reaches 3,000 degrees Centigrade it is high enough for the general radiation from the centre to break up gas molecules and dust particles into their constituent atoms and render them no longer capable of screening the radiation.

Light pressure quickly disrupts the *centre* of the cloud; but local concentrations of gas and dust continue to condense and contract further to form stars. Each star grows by attracting more gas and dust until it is blue white and its own light pressure is sufficient to blow away the remaining interstellar fuel.

Hundreds of blue stars in the Rosette Nebula dissipate whole clouds of gas, driving the remaining mass far out into unpopulated space. If the greater part of the mass disappears then the general gravitational field is much weakened and each star in the shower wanders off on its own at several miles a second until the whole shower is dispersed.

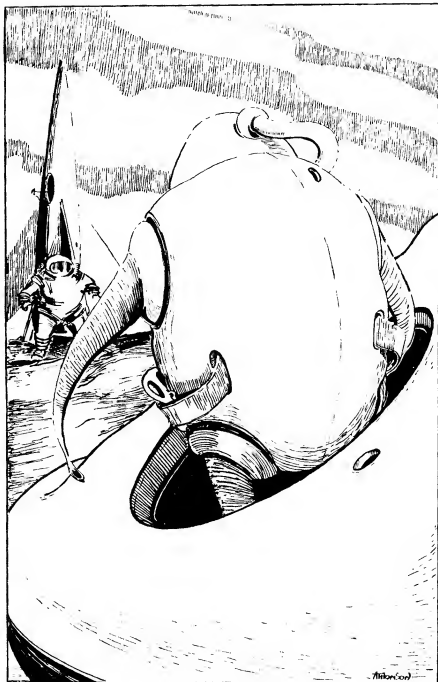
However, when most of the debris has condensed into stars before the remainder is dispersed sufficiently to be lost, then the shower remains as a spherical entity, tracking round the galaxy at the same average speed as similar clusters of stars.

These newly created blue Population I stars are reckless in their squandering of energy. But in doing so they present a fascinating and instructive picture to the enquiring minds and telescopes of men.

By Galactic standards, the Rosette Nebula is an evanescent flicker of beauty among the stars.

In this wonder of star birth we can also see ahead through time, to a period when each star has progressed through childhood to maturity and then to senility and the cold darkness of interstellar nothingness. Not only Galactically speaking are the feverish blue stars short-lived; their life span is often shorter than the whole age of life upon Earth.

But there will still be hot new blue stars being created in the Galaxy when at last mankind voyages out into the illimitable dark to explore all the wonder of the Rosette Nebula.



Another scan
by
cape1736

